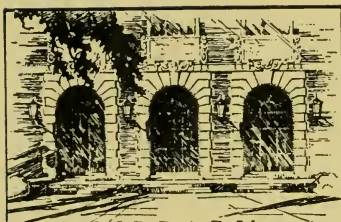


JULIET'S LOVERS



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Juliet's Lovers

BY

MABEL COLLINS

AUTHOR OF

‘THE PRETTIEST WOMAN IN WARSAW,’ ‘VIOLA FANSHAW,’
‘A DEBT OF HONOUR,’ ETC.

‘Fatal creature, bitter-sweet!’

SAPPHO.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON

WARD & DOWNEY

12 YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.

1893

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JULIET'S LOVERS.



CHAPTER I.

“YES—YES!” THE DECISION IS MADE.

JULIET was sitting just where Denvil had left her when Lord Francis came in; she had not moved. She was lost in a deep reverie, from which it was difficult to rouse herself. Her father looked at her keenly. There was a change in her face which led him to the conclusion Victoria had reached the night before. “Something has happened—she’s in love—who is it?”

But he knew her too well to try and force any confidence from her which she

was not ready to give. What he did was to exert his diplomatic faculties, and endeavour to make her see things from his point of view. His aim in spending his time with her to-day was to try and get a promise from her that she would not refuse Mannering if he asked her again. He thought he was quite clever enough to talk her into this; for he believed her to have inherited sufficient common sense from himself to appreciate the situation when properly put to her. He had not had time or opportunity to do this before, and had merely used his personal influence to get her to receive Mannering. He had then led Mannering to believe the refusal was practically withdrawn. If now he could induce Juliet to look at things reasonably, he felt that he could go to St Petersburg with a mind at ease. Victoria was excellent as a spy; he could rely on her to keep him

informed of all that occurred in his absence.

This morning he had been a little too clever. He had wished to have Juliet alone, free from an influence which always irritated and annoyed him. He had therefore arranged, when he met them at the theatre the previous evening, for Victoria to do some commissions in town, which would take her the greater part of the day. They were affairs which Graham could have attended to equally well, partly in connection with the household, partly concerning Juliet's theatrical dresses; but Victoria, in her present state of obedience, always took a hint from her father. There was a great deal to do, in preparation for the long absence from home, and it was quite natural for Victoria to undertake some of it. She understood, by a word from

Lord Francis, that he wanted her out of the way. So she took the brougham early in the morning, leaving word with Graham that she should not be back to lunch.

One consequence of this was, that there was no one to inform Lord Francis of Maurice Denvil's visit. Being ignorant of this he was, so to speak, working in the dark.

If Juliet had really loved and trusted him, her first impulse would have been to tell him all about it. But the worship for him which her mother had implanted in her mind had been fading out since that mother's death. It distressed her to be conscious of it; but though she loved him still, the trust in him was dying away. She had seen so much more of him, and on such a different side, since her mother's death. She had seen him

in the world. His mode of dealing with Heywood had wounded her pride. To her it seemed as if he had placed himself on the same level with the manager, by treating him in the way he did. No doubt it was the wisest in the end, it silenced all talk, saved all scandal, and made her rich and successful. But none the less it had wounded her. She felt she had been bargained over; and she had told herself that in the future she would sooner fight her own battles than have them fought for her in that way. She had had no choice but to submit; Lord Francis had left her no way out but his own. And she had a feeling that if she did not act according to her own wishes, and without consulting him, he would bend her to his will in the matter of her marriage, in the same manner. She instinctively foresaw

that he would so place her, that circumstances would force her to marry the man he intended her to marry. And, in fact, the first step had been taken in this direction already, by his putting the pressure on her to induce her to continue to receive Mannering's visits. She saw that already she was in a false position. Of course it would not have been so if Maurice Denvil had spoken but a little earlier—but he had not.

And so, as soon as Lord Francis began to talk, Juliet began to think, and to some purpose. These wily diplomatists do not deceive women so readily as they imagine. Juliet began to wonder why Lord Francis was so steady an advocate of Mannering's suit, considering that she had, evidently, a great career before her on the stage; that she was absolutely no burden or responsibility to her father even

now. Under such circumstances, why was she not free to please herself? Juliet had not the slightest wish to enter society; she was too true an artist to set any value on the arbitrary distinctions which mark the grades of social life. This indifference was no doubt a legacy from her mother, who had possessed a fine scorn for the *crème de la crème*; otherwise, probably, she would have compelled Lord Francis to give her her rightful position as his wife. But she had not cared for it. And Juliet felt no ambition to be Countess of Mannering for the sake of the position; the glory of becoming a leader in the society which now only patronised her, had no charms for her. She even dimly fancied it might all bore her very much. Was social life half as exciting as the stage?—she doubted it. As to possessions and money—these were mean-

ingless words to Juliet. It would grieve her to the heart if she ever had to leave her Putney villa for any palace or castle in the land; for this was home, and full of associations of her mother. She made more money than she knew what to do with. Therefore the prospect Lord Francis tried to allure her with did not dazzle her at all. Now that she was on the stage she had no wish to leave it; she would rather have her work to live for, having once tasted its excitements and its rewards. And with Denvil always with her—Maurice, whom she loved—what a life! one worth living, indeed.

Why should she not make her own choice? she asked herself. But she listened very patiently and said very little. Her distrust of her father was bringing out a certain amount of diplomatic ability in herself. Why, why, why was he so anxious

for her to see the advantages of becoming Lady Mannering? She could not gather that it would be any especial benefit to himself, though she asked him some searching questions.

They parted without her having said anything definite, much to Lord Francis's disgust. "She is becoming a woman too quickly," he said to himself, as he drove off early in the afternoon. "I thought she would be more malleable. That stage life is like a hot-house."

Juliet, meanwhile, sat and thought. Her mind was still undecided. She could not determine how to act. While she sat thus, deliberating, she saw Dr Pynton Clifford at the gate. It was understood that she did not receive visitors when Mrs Elwood was out; but some impulse made her tell the servant to admit Dr Clifford. She would not have done so,

no doubt, if she had had the slightest idea that the doctor considered he had quite as good a chance of winning her affections as Mannering with his money, or Denvil with his beauty, in spite of his age, and in spite of his wife! But then, Juliet, though she was being forced by hot-house life, was still sublimely ignorant of many sides of life. Some things, which she was trying very hard to learn just now, she fancied the doctor might enlighten her upon; and therefore she determined to have a little talk with him. She knew well that his profession and his great reputation took him into all the "worlds" of which our curious modern society is made up. He was a popular favourite, and could claim personal friendships with all classes, from royalty down to the last new ballerina. And wherever he was—at a dinner or ceremony, in a royal palace,

or behind the scenes of a theatre—he was always deep in conversation with the prettiest woman present, whoever she might be. Such a man as this is of necessity a man of information. So Juliet supposed, although she had but a very superficial idea of his character, and a great ignorance of life, as men and women of what is called the world know it. All she had to guide her at this crisis was her innate intuition.

Dr Pynton Clifford was immensely delighted at being received alone, although he carefully repressed any signs of his pleasure. He was too clever to allow them to be seen. He treated Juliet with the same courtly and profound admiration as usual. She was the prettiest woman he had ever seen; and his homage to her was therefore perfectly sincere, and could not be altered or even enhanced, the vital fact

being always the same. Dr Clifford cared absolutely nothing for character or qualities—a face, a figure, a foot—these were what he looked for in women. Juliet, having an object to serve in being agreeable to him was a little more so than usual; an actress, however sincere she may be at heart, can modulate her manner with the nicety which, in ordinary life, is only possible to a person who is insincere. Dr Pynton Clifford passed a most delightful hour, and sat lost in pleasant thoughts of the triumphant day when he should drive through the park with Juliet in his carriage, and show to the world that even at his age he could still win the most beautiful woman in it. Poor Dr Clifford! If he could but have guessed at the gulf that separated him from Juliet—his mind from hers—his ideas from hers! Even so, he would have gone on worshipping her beauty.

At last, while Dr Clifford was happily obscured by his dreams, Juliet led him up to what she had in her mind. She had brought the conversation round to Lord Mannering.

"I can never quite understand Lord Mannering being such a great friend of my father's," she said; "they do not appear to have any tastes in common."

"Ah," said the old doctor, "you forget the overpowering interest of politics."

"Politics!" exclaimed Juliet.

She began to see light.

"The political world is unknown to you; I despair of explaining its intricacies. It is a mystery to outsiders; once inside and it is all too easy to understand, and a poor game at the best to my thinking. All party interest! But then I'm no politician."

"Party interest," repeated Juliet, looking at him wonderingly.

"Party interest," repeated Dr Pynton Clifford. "That's my definition of politics in two words. But, then, I'm an outsider. I don't see how to explain the detestable system. For example, Lord Francis and Lord Mannering hold the same views. They are both Conservatives of the right sort according to their own thinking; they know each other's opinions on every subject that can come up; and whatever they may be outside the House, in it they stand side by side. Mannering is a very important person—the hope of the Liberal-Conservatives, I believe the newspapers call him—likely to be Premier some day."

"Oh!" said Juliet, beginning to see more light, "it is Lord Mannering who is so important."

"Why, of course," answered Dr Pynton

Clifford, in his turn regarding her with a faint wonder. "Why, you don't read the papers! It is Mannering's doing your father's going to St. Petersburg just now."

"And Lord Mannering will become more important?"

"Certainly," said the doctor; "a peer, unlike some things, grows more valuable with age. Lord Mannering is, politically, one of the most conspicuous men in England, not altogether by his own doing—he was born into the position, and his decided character has increased it. If he goes on as he has begun, he will be the leader of his party—detestable word, I hate it!"

Dr Clifford was tired of Lord Mannering as a subject of conversation also, evidently, so Juliet let him drift away to other topics. She answered him as well

as she could with her mind full of thought, and was very glad when Victoria Elwood came in, and the tea-tray also.

Soon after she made an excuse — said she had been talking all day, and must rest for the evening's work—and so got rid of the doctor. She went to her own room, locked the door, and set herself to think out her position and make up her mind.

Now that she had discovered a motive, she had not a shadow of doubt that it was self-interest which made Lord Francis determined that she should marry Manner-
ing. She talked with herself, and with the memory of her mother, alone in her room, and she decided that in the matter of her marriage she was right to choose for herself. If she had been convinced of her father's love for her, it would have been different; but she was not—if she

had trusted him; but she did not. Her intuitions told her that her happiness was nothing to him; that he simply wished to turn her beauty and genius to the best account.

And so she made up her mind.

When she came down to the carriage to go to the theatre, she was flushed, brilliant, triumphant. She had decided to take her happiness.

She did not see Denvil till he came on to the stage.

Something in her manner in their love-scene seemed to tell him his wish was to be gratified. Under cover of a tempest of applause—which they invariably got at a certain point in their scene, and for which he waited anxiously—he spoke to her.

“Tell me,” he said under his breath; “I cannot wait. Have you decided?”

“Yes,” said Juliet.

"Do you consent?"

"Yes," she answered.

It is to be imagined that a love-scene played with interludes like this was well played. Denvil was like a man intoxicated with love. Never had he shown to better advantage.

When they were called before the curtain Juliet saw a lady in the stalls stand right up, apparently carried away by the excitement of the moment. Her eyes were fastened upon Juliet, and something in their expression frightened her — the intense look chilled her — for she saw no admiration in it. The curtain fell. Denvil detained her. His hand was on her arm.

"You will marry me, and ask no one's leave! Oh, Juliet, let it be soon! I shall be so afraid of losing you! And no one is to know."

"I wish Lord Mannering could know!"

said Juliet, for her conscience troubled her about the young peer. "No one else need."

"Mannerings shall know!" exclaimed Denvil. "May I come and see you to-morrow?"

"No—not again till Lord Francis has gone—except on Sunday afternoon, if you like."

"I shall be away on Sunday," said Denvil.

Again Graham came to fetch Juliet; and, finding these two again wasting the precious moments in talk, her suspicions become certainties.

"She will marry him," she said to herself, as in silence she proceeded to quickly change Juliet's dress. "And she will be miserable. He's too handsome to be good."

An odd argument, and one usually used

by men about women, not *vice versâ*. But Graham, though an old woman, was very modern in her ideas. Her mind had been trained in the theatrical school of the nineteenth century — a hot-house, as Lord Francis put it. Graham knew very well what temptations and misfortunes beauty brings with it to man or woman.

The morning brought Juliet her first love letter. Denvil had written it in his dressing-room, and posted it on his way home. He was half mad at the thought that he must go away on Sunday without seeing her. But there seemed no help for it. He gave her no idea as to what took him away, or even suggested that there was any chance of his not being back on Monday evening. Juliet read the letter three times, and wore it all day inside the bosom of her dress. She was perfectly happy; and this letter—so sweet, so pas-

sionate — just filled her cup to the brim. It was such a pleasure to know she had it there, and to know that she had Denvil's love, wherever he might be. She was not sorry for this brief absence; she was afraid if they met in the presence of Lord Francis he would penetrate their secret.

The morning brought a letter also from Lord Mannering, which ruffled her a little. Not knowing what had been said to him by Lord Francis, she did not think it was necessary for him to tell her that he was going away for a few days' cruise in his yacht. She tossed the note aside after glancing it over, and did not think of it again.

This Saturday proved to be a quiet day for her. Lord Francis did not appear. He had plenty to do before he departed for Russia. Juliet passed a quiet, happy

day of dreamy rest; she found it a trouble even to speak to Mrs Elwood or Graham, and feigned sleep in her hammock in order to be alone with the love that burned in her heart.

The evening brought again the intoxication of meeting Denvil, even though it were before a crowded house—of hearing his voice utter words of love—of a few brief stolen words between themselves. One faint note of discord came upon her sense of joy—again she saw the lady with the great dark eyes rise in the audience and fix them on her—and it seemed to her there was a menace in those eyes. She grasped Denvil's arm nervously as the curtain came down.

“Maurice!” she said, “who can that woman be who stares at me so strangely—twice I have seen her?”

“How can I tell,” he answered; “I

have no eyes but for you. I should not know if the house were empty, or full of monkeys instead of men and women. Juliet, if I get back safely, will you marry me at once — without any delay — there is no need for any delay?”

“If you get back safely!” she repeated, “what do you mean? Are you going into some danger?”

“Yes, I am going into some danger. Will you promise me? If I have that to think of, I do not believe the danger can touch me.”

“Yes, I promise,” she answered. “But, oh, Maurice, tell me what the danger is.”

“No,” he said, “that I cannot. But now you have given me that promise, rest assured I shall come back to claim it.”

CHAPTER II.

“For all is dark where thou art not.”

AMONG the other little luxuries which Lord Mannering possessed, without, apparently, appreciating them, was a villa at Ostende. As it was now the height of the season there, Lord Mannering's yacht was lying about idle; there was nothing to excite comment on his running across for a visit. Nothing, that is, to anyone who did not know his character. But the charming old Flemish lady who took care of the Villa Mimosa knew his lordship's character well, and was consequently immensely surprised to see him at this time of the year. Mannering hated the season at a fashionable watering-place as much as he hated an

ordinary London drawing-room. If it had been mid-winter, the wind blowing furiously, and the sea arriving in torrents upon the windows of the villa, Madame Stuers would not have been astonished at his arrival. He had appeared in such weather once or twice, and walked about on the *digue* when no one else had the courage to face the wildness of the sea; passing a few days, or a week or two, very quietly in the villa, endearing himself to the old lady, as he always did to his subordinates, by his gentle temper and perfect docility in small matters.

But now! when the windows looked on a dense throng of fashionable humanity, morning, afternoon and evening; when it was impossible to step out of the door without plunging into a slowly-moving stream of persons of every nationality, wearing the most extravagant toilettes, and engaged in

the most frivolous occupations, or the most outrageous flirtations! "His lordship won't stay two days!" thought Madame Stuers, shaking her head, and talking to herself about this extraordinary event, while she sent her dull Flemish *bonne* running on all sorts of errands. But, to her surprise, his lordship did stay two days. The yacht was kept close at hand; but he did not go on it again until Monday at noon. All Sunday he sat and read, occasionally looking out at the crowd of strange men and women who promenaded in front of his windows. They did not interest him; they did not even seem real. It was like a panorama, a moving picture. He felt no desire to go amongst these people, and fall a prey to some enterprising Russian or Belgian lady, who would have recognised him as a rich man with one glance of her practised eye, and dropped her handkerchief in his way

for him to pick up. No!—as he had said to Lord Francis, if he could not have what he wanted he did not want anything else. The dogged resolution which characterised his political life characterised his emotional life just as strongly. He wanted Juliet. If Juliet was unattainable at the moment, he could sit and think about her; and that seemed to him next-best, as the children say.

Very early on Monday morning he met a friend who had crossed in the Sunday boat, and the two went off to Nieuport in the train. Arrived here they walked away over the *dunes*, until they were as lonely to all intents and purposes as if on a desert; with the exception of two other black figures, afar off, which came slowly towards them across the shifting sand. These were the other men they had come to meet. No one had the slightest suspicion of the

whole affair, in spite of the interest aroused not long before by a duel taking place on these same Nieuport *dunes* between an Englishman and a French nobleman.

Denvil made an unusual request. He wished to speak to Lord Mannering, alone, for one moment. "Something I have to say," he explained to his second, "but don't let him imagine for a moment that it is an apology."

Mannering bowed when he received the request, and slowly walked to where Denvil stood, alone.

"It is only right," said Denvil, "that you should know one thing, in case this morning's work should be fatal to either of us. When I used a lady's name at the club the other night I was maddened by jealousy and, as I thought, by deceit. I had been told she was your promised wife. Since then I have learned that I had been

told a lie ; I had been deceived, but not by her. She is now my promised wife. That is all, Lord Mannering. She wished you to know it, and I told her you should, from me."

With this he walked back to his place. Mannering looked after him in silence and pure amazement. However there was nothing to be said ; so he, too, took up his position. What he sincerely wished, at the moment, was that he had Lord Francis standing a few paces off, instead of Denvil. He saw at once that he had been purposely misled.

It was soon over, and Mannering, accompanied by his second, hurried away as quickly as possible ; for Denvil, wounded, lay on the sands. A surgeon, whose presence had been arranged for, was quickly on the scene ; but long before the police had got wind of the affair Mannering was on board his yacht and well out of reach.

He paced the deck in a dark and gloomy humour which made him isolated; none of the men liked to approach him.

Denvil's wound was not very serious, but it was utterly impossible for him to be moved for several days, so there was nothing for it but to let the surgeon take charge of him, and telegraph to Heywood. The purport of the message was that Denvil had been taken ill; that his doctor could not promise his return to the theatre for several nights.

Juliet, just as she was getting into her brougham, received a telegram also. She thought it was probably from her father; he was fond of sending these quick messages. So she took it calmly enough and got into the carriage before reading it. It was lucky for her that she did so. When she opened it and saw it was signed, "Maurice"—her heart seemed to stop beating. "*Don't*

be alarmed at my non-appearance — will write you and explain. Maurice." She looked it all over. From Ostende. That was all the clue she had to his whereabouts. She crushed the message up in her hand and leaned back in the carriage, saying nothing to either of her companions, who were, as usual, Mrs Elwood and Graham. Both looked at her. The old servant, seeing at a glance that Juliet did not intend to speak, said to herself, "It's from him." Mrs Elwood looked at her searchingly, but could make no guess about the sender of the telegram. So she drew back into her own corner, and got to work to speculate as to who it might be; inveighing the while, in her own mind, on the secretive tendencies of her sex.

Juliet felt very thankful for Denvil's forethought in having sent a message to reach her before she got to the theatre.

When she arrived, she was told at once that he was dangerously ill. Holding his words tight in her hand, the words that told her not to be alarmed, she succeeded in not appearing too greatly concerned. She had to play with his under-study, a good-looking young actor, who was delighted at the unexpected opportunity of distinguishing himself. But, oh, how tame and flat his performance seemed to Juliet! the love-scene was torture—it was the first time she had had to play a love-scene with a man she did not love. She understood, by this experience, how it is that stage love-making becomes, too often, so mechanical and unnatural.

She was thankful when the play was over, to return home and go to her room, there to think and speculate and wonder. What could it mean! What had happened to him! All night long she was restless and

anxious. This bitter anxiety about the welfare of those we love is one of the tortures passion inflicts.

Juliet was up and dressed, and out in the garden in the morning before the postman arrived; when he came he found her leaning on the gate looking for him. Yes; he gave her the letter she longed for—from Maurice Denvil. She went away into a quiet corner of the garden and read it hastily, feverishly. Then she read it again quietly, and with wonder. Then she let it drop on her lap, and fell into deep thought.

Denvil had told her nearly all the story; as much as he could manage to write, with his doctor standing over him, and forbidding him the exertion.

She understood that there had been a duel; that the cause of the duel was herself; that Lord Mannering had evidently

been under the impression that he had a right to be Juliet's champion, until the very last moment before the duel, when Denvil undeceived him. She understood that someone had certainly misled Lord Mannering intentionally.

It could be no one but her father.

Her heart grew cold towards him as she thought of the treachery of such an act. It was not inconceivable to her, for she had already realised that he would try to force her into a marriage with Mannering by placing her in some difficult position. But she had not thought he could be so deliberately false as this. Her face grew pale first, and then flushed. "I will take my life into my own hands," she said to herself. "I will not be his tool and plaything!"

Denvil assured her his wound was a mere scratch; so she was not harassed by much

anxiety about that. She was rather relieved that he would be away until after Lord Francis had left for St Petersburg. So she eventually went quietly into the house, her precious letter carefully hidden in her dress. She spent a happy hour writing to Denvil; and went for a walk in order to post it herself. What intoxicating delight there was in the writing and posting of that letter—in the thought that possessed her mind all the time to the exclusion of every other. “I am loved”—to a nature like Juliet’s, capable of extravagant joys, there is delirium in the consciousness of love. She was intensely happy, though Denvil was ill and far away, in the knowledge that he lived, and that he loved her. She looked forward with a longing that was like pain to the next morning, in the hope of another letter; but there was none. The blank was awful. No

letter! Was he worse — was he dying? What could she do? She restrained her impatience as well as she could throughout the day. Lord Francis left England that evening, and came to the theatre to say good-bye to her just before he started. He noticed that she seemed absent, and that two red spots of colour, which told of some inward excitement, burned in her cheeks. He asked her if she was well—she laughed, and that was all her answer. Juliet had never been ill. She was gifted with a glorious physical vitality. Lord Francis, having a train to catch, had to go away without finding out what it was that disturbed her. She was glad when he was gone, for she felt as if she must speak soon to someone, and she dreaded betraying her secret to him, who, she felt certain, would thwart her without scruple.

The next morning found Juliet waiting

at the garden-gate for the postman. There was no letter. Fear, terror of she knew not what at first—then understood to be death—seized upon her. If Denvil was dead! A cry of horror, of agony, burst from her at the thought. She clung to the gate for support, and leaned her head on it. Oh, how she loved him! What an insupportable fear this was that gnawed at her heart!

“You are in trouble, I am sure. Won't you make a friend of me and let me see if I can help you?”

It was Mrs Elwood's voice.

Victoria Elwood hated early rising. But curiosity was a master passion with her. She had observed Juliet's anxiety about the postman; for her window commanded the gate. This morning curiosity conquered idleness. She rose, and, hastily dressing herself in a morning wrapper,

followed Juliet into the garden. She thought Juliet's cry of distress justified her in speaking as she did. Juliet turned hastily and met Victoria's black eyes, which were bent on her with their most honest, straightforward expression. A person much more experienced in life than Juliet might have thought—here at least is an honest, disinterested friend. She felt a great desire to confide in Victoria; she longed for someone to speak to. But something stopped her from speaking of her love—of her engagement. Was it unconscious, intuitive fear of Victoria? She checked herself with the words almost on her lips. But she told her of the duel; that Denvil was wounded; that she feared he might be dying. Denvil had not told her to keep the duel a secret, and she felt it such a relief to her bursting heart to speak of his danger!

"They fought about you, I suppose?" said Mrs Elwood.

Juliet had said nothing about the reason of the quarrel. There was a bitter tone in her voice which startled even Juliet, absorbed as she was.

"Yes—" she answered, hesitating a little what to say.

"I thought so. What fools men are! What are you going to do?"

"I am going to telegraph to know how he is. I have the address of his hotel."

So saying Juliet ran away for her hat, and in another moment was walking down the road to the post-office.

Now, Juliet had not asked Mrs Elwood not to talk about the duel, simply because it had not occurred to her that there was anyone to talk to for some hours to come. She was therefore greatly surprised when she came back into the breakfast-room to

find Victoria regaling a group of servants with the exciting news. Juliet had never dreamed of such a possibility, for she was not in the habit of talking to servants herself. But Mrs Elwood was of a different type, and enjoyed nothing better than the *bavardage* of a servants' hall. It was quite natural to her to tell the whole of this exciting story to the first servant she met.

Juliet was terribly annoyed, and showed it; and the servants quickly left the room.

"Oh, Victoria!" she exclaimed, "I don't want this talked about! It will be all over London directly."

"Well—you are proud of it, surely?"

"Indeed, I am not. Do ask the servants not to talk."

Mrs Elwood left the breakfast-table and went into the kitchen. She came back almost immediately.

"No use," she said. "They have told

the coachman, and he has just gone down to the stables."

"Why do you talk so much to the servants?" asked Juliet, for the first time commenting on what she had wondered at silently before.

"Why not?" demanded Mrs Elwood with a certain recklessness of tone and manner, born probably of the knowledge that her father was safe on the sea. "I often find them to be my best friends." Which remark might have taught Juliet something if she had been more experienced in the ways of the world than she was, and had paid any attention to it. As it was, she hardly heard what was said. She was beginning to try and calculate how long it would be before she could get an answer to her telegram. Her mind was far away, with Denvil, in the Ostende hotel, from which he wrote. What if

he lay dead ! Would it matter if people talked or not ! She could not bear her own thoughts, the terrors that oppressed her ; and, rising from the table, went away to her own room. Mrs Elwood, after waiting to have a long talk with the servant who came to clear the breakfast, went back to her room, and to her bed. She locked the door and contentedly smoked a cigarette. For the first time she had heard of Denvil's morning visit on the day she was doing commissions in town. The housemaid and the cook both thought Juliet was in love with Maurice Denvil ; so did Mrs Elwood. But they all believed she meant to marry Lord Mannering. Inferior natures allow for passion, which is a feeling that can be dominated by prudence ; but they know nothing of love, which dares all and fears no consequences.

By the middle of the day Juliet's anxieties were relieved. She got a telegram telling her that Denvil was better, but the doctor had forbidden him to write. It ended,—“I return in two or three days to claim your promise.”

Naturally this threw her from the extreme of distress into the opposite extreme of trembling joy. Her anxiety had taught her how deep her love was. She knew that she could not refuse to fulfil her promise now, even if there were any reason to do so. Her own heart would not let her.

CHAPTER III.

FALLING ROSE-LEAVES.

DENVIL, to his amazement, arrived in London to find himself notorious—not as an actor, but as a duellist. The papers had all given graphic accounts of the duel between an English nobleman and an English actor on the *dunes* of Nieuport; some had given Lord Mannering's name, some Denvil's. They all gave different reasons for the quarrel; some hinted that it was about a well-known and beautiful actress. But Juliet's name was not mentioned by any one of them, to Denvil's great relief.

Perhaps the only other person who was as much surprised as Denvil himself by

these newspaper accounts was the Countess of Mannering. She was simply astonished, and incredulous. A quarrel about an actress, and a duel with an actor seemed so utterly incompatible with her son's character. The fact that he had gone away in his yacht so suddenly looked as if something strange had happened; but still she could not believe this story in the papers. Lady Mannering belonged to an old school, and lived out of the world; her ideas about the stage might be described as primitive. And she could not believe in Mannering stooping to any vulgar intrigue. Eventually she concluded it was all a made-up story, concocted by political enemies or envious persons, and decided to think no more about it.

But Maurice Denvil found himself a kind of hero all in a moment; and at the clubs it was openly said that Juliet Vane

was the cause of the duel. So that it was quite impossible to wear an innocent manner or hush the matter up. The theatre was more densely crowded than usual on the first night of his reappearance, and the audience more enthusiastic. A kind of personal interest was shown in the love-making of these two by their admirers; how could it be otherwise, after Denvil had been wounded for her sake? No one knew but the few men who had been present on the occasion that it was Denvil who had given the offence. They said nothing, having pledged themselves to Mannering. It could hardly be expected that Denvil should explain that he had fought on the wrong side! The misunderstanding was so involved as to excuse him from that.

“My darling,” he said to Juliet, on the stage, “everyone is talking about us now

that this affair of the duel is known. We cannot announce the engagement or your father will be back in double-quick time to prevent the marriage. Let us set everything right by being married quietly, without any more hesitation. Then we can announce it when we like and no one can interfere. Your mind is made up, is it not—you will keep to your promise?"

"Yes," answered Juliet; "I keep to it."

"Then I'll get a special licence, and we will get married directly. And you can tell Mrs Elwood to stop at home when we go on tour."

The next day Denvil arrived very early in the afternoon at Putney Hill. Mrs Elwood quietly kept to her post of chaperon, eyeing him the while with a great deal of interest. He looked pale, and the pain he had suffered had made him handsomer than ever; it had given a

new expression, a something pathetic, to those wonderful eyes of his. "He is irresistible," said Mrs Elwood to herself. "If I were capable of falling in love I should fall in love with him. What a fool Mannering is to leave him here to make the running! His only chance was to have killed him! I wonder how soon he will dare to come back."

Never was the old saying, that two is company and three is none, better illustrated than this afternoon. The duel was a subject carefully avoided by all; the one subject which absorbed the thoughts of Denvil and Juliet could not be mentioned. So the conversation was perforce trivial. Nevertheless, the lovers were intensely happy—were they not together! There was one safe topic to talk about, and an interesting one to them both—that of the new play. Denvil had not heard anything

about it as yet; and Juliet described to him her own *rôle*, and the suggestions for his. The enthusiasm she had for her art fired as she spoke; her face was flushed and eager. It seemed beautiful to know that in the future they would be together in love and in work. This is a rare pleasure, given only to some. Too often the other interests of life separate lovers; Juliet knew she had not this to fear. Maurice admired her as an artist as deeply as he loved her as a woman; she was conscious of this, and it gave her a delicious sense of power.

To Victoria's great relief some other callers arrived. For the first time in her chaperonage she had experienced the *ennui* of undoubtedly "playing gooseberry." Denvil took his first chance of speaking to Juliet, under cover of the conversation carried on by the others. He handed her a book

which she had dropped, and as their hands touched he said in a very low voice,—

“I have got the licence; it is here in my pocket. We have only to fix the day.”

From this moment it seemed to Juliet, when she looked back on this precious time afterwards, that she passed the hours and the days in a passionate dream of delight. In the few seconds they had to speak together on the stage she and Denvil made their plans. These seconds were absolutely their own. No one could overhear them, or interfere, or separate them. Standing there, in the full glare of light, before hundreds of persons, they were more alone than at any other time. Every day he came to Putney, and sat worshipping at Juliet's feet, with Mrs Elwood looking on, under the impression that she was completely *au courant* with all the passing affairs. The dramatist

came down and read his scenes as they were written; read them there in that sunny garden to those two lovers who were to go on hand in hand through one success upon the stage to yet another. Was it not an idyl? the moments slipped by so quickly, as very rare and precious moments always do. They fell away noiselessly, softly, unnoticed, as the petals fell from the roses in Juliet's garden.

It was August. Everyone who could escape had already left town. The theatre was closed. In a week the tour was to start.

At last one day Juliet roused herself to the necessity of telling Mrs Elwood she did not want her to travel with her. It was necessary, for to-morrow she was to be married.

"But Lord Francis expects me to travel with you," said Victoria, immensely sur-

prised, and opening her eyes very wide.

“Oh, never mind Lord Francis!” exclaimed Juliet, a little impatiently.

And Mrs Elwood opened her eyes still wider.

“Who are you going to travel with?” she asked.

“I will tell you as soon as I have settled,” said Juliet in her usual gentle voice.

She intended to tell everyone as soon as her marriage was a fact accomplished. The mention of Lord Francis irritated her a little. From him only had she any disagreeable consequences to fear, as she thought.

Mrs Elwood sat in amazed wonder, and much wished Lord Francis were within reach. “She wants to get rid of me, in order to carry on her flirtation with Denvil,” she thought to herself. She was about to speak again, but Juliet left the room.

She was not able, on that last day, to bear Mrs Elwood's penetrating gaze and inquisitive tongue. She was so happy; she shrank from anything that ruffled her profound pleasure, or disturbed it. Out into the garden she wandered, among the falling overblown roses, leaving Mrs Elwood to puzzle and wonder.

"She will not have to wonder long," thought Juliet. "She shall know to-morrow."

CHAPTER IV.

“For there was no other girl, oh bridegroom, like her.

It was Juliet Vane's wedding day.

She rose early, and let Graham bring her tea to her room, as was her usual habit; then she dressed quietly, and took her hat, saying she wished for a walk alone, and did not want Mrs Elwood disturbed. Graham readily acquiesced. She was not very much attached to Mrs Elwood herself, and pitied her young mistress for being perpetually condemned to that lady's society.

The intense heat which August had brought with it was a sufficient excuse for Juliet to have laid aside her heavy mourning, except when she went into

London. Since her engagement to Denvil she had shrank from the black robes and crape, and felt that if her mother could see her she would not wish her to wear them in her new-found joy. For some time she had been wearing white dresses at home, and the only difference she made to-day was to put on a fresh one.

“The other is not soiled — scarcely creased,” thought Graham; “but she can afford to dress like a princess, and why should she not? Her taste is perfect—it turns always to perfect freshness and delicacy.” So the old woman, approving in her heart of Juliet’s fastidiousness, brought her a clean muslin robe. It was absolutely plain; but so fresh and spotless! Juliet took her wide, white garden hat, which had no ornament but a knot of white chiffon, and went down into the garden. One side of the house was

covered with a creeping rose tree, full of small white roses. She gathered some clusters, and put one at her neck and one at her waist.

Maurice Denvil was waiting in a hansom half-way down the hill. He sprang out when he saw her, and came to meet her.

"Juliet!" he exclaimed, "how lovely you look! You are like a white angel!"

They got into the cab and quickly drove away.

It was just about this time (perhaps a little later) that a lady came to the stage door of the theatre and asked the stage-door keeper for Miss Vane's private address. The man looked at her, and was propitiated by her elegant figure and her beautiful, sad, dark eyes.

"I will give Miss Vane a letter or message for you to-night, madam," he said,

civilly ; “ but I am not allowed to give her address to anyone.”

“ Could I see her, do you think, if I came in the evening ? ” asked the lady.

The man shook his head.

“ Not unless you have an appointment, madam. Quite impossible.”

She hesitated—turned away—and turned back.

“ Is Mr Heywood here ? ”

“ Yes, I believe he is,” said the man.

“ He came in early about some letters and telegrams, but he is very busy.”

“ He will see me, I think,” she said.

“ He knows me.”

“ I’ll see if he’s in his room,” was the answer.

The man went away, and soon came back again, followed by Heywood, who was just going out. He had no idea of speaking to this lady who asked for

him at the stage door; of course she wanted "an engagement," and as certainly he had none to give her. But, when he saw his visitor, he raised his hat with a look of surprise.

"Let me speak to you a moment, Mr Heywood!" she said hurriedly.

"Come into my room," he answered, and went back into the theatre.

She followed him. He ushered her into a little den heaped with papers.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

Evidently she was agitated; but she controlled herself and spoke quietly.

"Can you give me Miss Vane's address?" she asked. "I want to go and see her."

Heywood looked at her in doubt.

"It's not etiquette," he said; "but I'll do better than that. I'll take you down to see her."

"No, no! I want to go alone!" she

exclaimed, and now her agitation was unmistakable.

"Merciful powers!" thought Heywood to himself. "She's *jealous*!" He took a turn round the room, reflecting.

"I'll send a message, asking her to make an appointment for you to call on her," he suggested.

She approached him, and touched his arm gently with her hand.

"Give me her address, Mr Heywood!" she said; "I want to go and see her *now*."

Heywood looked into these dark, bright eyes, and saw something that pleased him.

"Well—" he said, hesitating, "I'll stretch a point for you, on one condition. Don't tell anybody who gave you the address. I oughtn't to do it, you know."

"No one shall ever know!" she exclaimed eagerly. "I swear it."

He went to his table and quickly wrote down a few words on a slip of paper. This he gave to her. Then a better thought came to him.

"Can you remember it?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she answered, reading it over again.

"Then give me that," he said, and taking the paper from her, tore it up. "Can I do anything more for you?" he asked, taking up his hat.

"No," she replied, "Thank you very much."

And in another moment she was gone, and was hurrying quickly up the street.

Heywood laughed to himself as he slowly followed her. "Ah, my lady," he thought, mentally addressing Juliet, "there's a rod in pickle for you, that you

don't expect! And, by Jove, it's a hot one!"

Maurice Denvil came with Juliet half-way up the hill, and there they parted.

"My darling," he said, holding her hand in his as they stood for a few moments under the shade of a wide tree, "I give you to-day to write to your father, to tell Mrs Elwood and Graham, and all the rest of it. I, too, have some things to arrange. But to-morrow I claim you. Tell Graham to pack your trunk to-day, and we will go away for a whole week of pleasure and rest, alone, before we have to go on tour. I shall come up this evening, after dinner, to see you, and to settle our train for to-morrow, and where we shall go. You will be ready, won't you?"

"Yes," said Juliet; "I will be ready," and so they parted.

Denvil looked back half-a-dozen times

at the graceful figure of his beautiful wife as she walked up the hill. It was hard work to leave her even for a few hours, even with the knowledge that she was his own, irrevocably, and that after those few hours had passed they would be together always.

He could see nothing but the woman he loved; he had no eyes for anything else, or perhaps he might have noticed another woman who had paused on the other side of the road, further up the hill, and watched the parting. She watched him till he was out of sight, and then turned and followed Juliet. Her walk was hesitating, as if she were overpowered by some strong agitation. But she did not waver or turn back. She went on up the hill, and turned into the road where Juliet's house stood. When she saw it she drew back into the road a little while, looking at it. Her eyes wandered over

the rose-clad walls, the windows framed in flowers, the garden so carefully tended. Juliet and her mother had the same passion for flowers, and the garden was full of plants and blooming shrubs, which Marguerite had planted. "Beautiful, like herself!" murmured the lady, as she stood and looked at the pretty, peaceful home before her.

She was the dark-eyed woman who had obtained Juliet's address from Heywood that morning; she had sufficient beauty of her own to be able to admire another's. So slight, yet so graceful was she, that her movements had something of the serpent in them; with blue-black hair, and an oval, olive-tinted face, lit by her strangely mournful eyes, she was one who would attract attention anywhere.

After a few moments spent in looking at the house, she suddenly roused herself, and, approaching the gate, went straight in.

The front door stood wide open ; just within it stood Mrs Elwood, in a plain black dress. The visitor addressed her immediately, taking her for an upper servant ; for Victoria Elwood was a woman without distinction of appearance.

“Can I see Miss Vane?” asked the lady, firmly enough ; yet there was something in her voice which told Victoria she was agitated.

“She never sees anyone in the morning,” was the answer, after a moment's hesitation.

“Will you take her my name, and ask her if she will see me?” asked the visitor, very gently.

And again her mournful eyes and elegant figure made a conquest. Victoria liked her, and gave her one of those charming smiles which she could summon when she wished to please.

“There is no harm in asking her,

certainly," she said; "I'll send a servant up to her. What name shall I say?"

"Mrs Denvil," said the lady.

Victoria, who was moving away to call a servant, paused, and looked at her keenly; but the direct regard of her straight-looking black eyes produced no effect on the visitor, who looked back into them quietly and confidently.

"Mrs Denvil?" she repeated, interrogatively; "Mrs Maurice Denvil?"

"Mrs Maurice Denvil," said the lady.

Victoria looked all the harder at her for a moment. Then she suddenly became very civil.

"Come into the drawing-room," she said, "while I send up to her. It is so hot here."

While she led the way across the hall to the cool drawing-room, Victoria suffered a sharp internal conflict. If she sent a servant

up to Juliet, who had gone to her own room, she would have a few minutes in which to talk to this unexpected visitor, and, perhaps, appease her curiosity a little ; on the other hand, if she went herself, she would see the effect of the announcement of this name on Juliet. After a struggle she decided on the latter course, and, leaving the visitor in the drawing-room, passed slowly up the stairs, thinking, puzzling, as she went.

Juliet was sitting in an easy-chair by the window of her room, still wearing the white morning-dress which was her wedding gown, and with the happy look on her face which gave it such an inexpressible charm. She was exquisitely beautiful. Victoria thought so, as she stood at the door. Graham was in the room folding some dresses. Juliet had just told her she wanted a trunk packed, and was just

going to tell her it was to take with her on her honeymoon, when Mrs Elwood interrupted them. The face Juliet turned to the door was brilliant with her own thoughts and dreams.

“Will you see a visitor, Juliet?” said Mrs Elwood; “a lady.”

“Who is it?” asked Juliet.

The answer came very clear and plain.

“Mrs Maurice Denvil.”

Graham turned sharply round, forgetting her usual decorum in her surprise.

“There isn’t such a person,” she said.

“Mr Denvil’s not married.”

“I don’t know anything about it,” said Victoria, answering Graham, but looking steadily at Juliet. “I only know that’s the name she gives. She said Mrs Denvil first, and then Mrs Maurice Denvil. She is very handsome. Will you see her, Juliet?”

"Yes," said Juliet, "I will see her.

Mrs Elwood had seen what she wanted; she turned to leave the room, and Graham quickly shut the door on her, then the old woman hurried to Juliet's side.

"My darling!" she said, "you look like death! What is it? Can I help you?"

"I don't know yet that it's anything," said Juliet, rather wildly. "Help me to go downstairs—now—quick! I don't want to waste a moment."

And she rose to her feet; but her tall figure seemed to waver as she stood. Graham quickly fetched something from the dressing-table and tried to force it on her; it was a dose of sal volatile. But Juliet put it from her. She went so quickly down the stairs that she was only a moment later than Victoria at the drawing-room door.

CHAPTER V.

“Ah, dear! but come thou back to me!”

VICTORIA ELWOOD found the lady who called herself Mrs Maurice Denvil standing in the drawing-room, her eyes fixed on the door.

“Miss Vane will see you,” said Mrs Elwood; “she will be here in a moment. Won’t you sit down?”

All the answer she received was a quiet “Thank you.”

Victoria was about to speak again when the door opened and Juliet came in. She bowed slightly, and then turned and spoke to Mrs Elwood without meeting her eyes. She had complete command of herself now, and looked almost the same as she had looked a quarter-an-hour ago. Not quite!

—there was an agony in her eyes, like that you see in the eyes of a terrified, helpless animal, that knows not what dread fate awaits it at the cruel hands of man. Just that terrible look was in Juliet's eyes now—the dread of unknown and unimaginable suffering from which there was no escape. But it was only an expression as yet, it would take time to harden into lines upon her face. When she dropped her eyes she could veil it. Even Victoria, looking keenly at her, thought she had entirely recovered herself.

“The coachman is waiting at the door for orders,” said Juliet; “I do not want the carriage to-day.”

“Nor I,” said Victoria, without moving.

“Then will you please tell him so,” said Juliet.

She advanced towards her visitor, and looking at her, recognised the dark eyes;

she had twice met their intense gaze in the theatre.

“Please sit down,” she said, and herself sank into a chair quickly.

Her strength suddenly failed her, with that recognition. What was the blow about to fall? What was the menace that lurked in those mournful eyes?

Mrs Elwood went to the drawing-room door and spoke to the man who was standing in the hall, and immediately returned, closing the door, behind her. Now Juliet had intended what she said as a hint; but Victoria never took hints except from her father, and then only when he was in such a position regarding her that they became commands. She had not the slightest idea of losing a word of this interview.

Juliet said nothing when she returned; a feeling of sickening dread prevented her

from speaking. But her visitor came to the rescue.

"May I speak to you alone, Miss Vane," she said.

Juliet merely bowed her head. Mrs Elwood had no choice but to go, which she did with a heightened colour.

"I am so glad you were willing to see me," said the dark-eyed lady in an unnaturally quiet voice, in which there were signs of forcibly suppressed excitement. "They told me at the theatre that perhaps you would not."

She sat down as she spoke, in a chair very near Juliet, and looked intently at her. Juliet returned the gaze, and for the first time was sufficiently collected to scrutinise her visitor. This elegant woman was some five years older than herself, and her face bore the mark of strong passions and great excitements on it;

care, too, had made some lines. But she was very handsome, and her manner was winning and seductive.

“It took me a long time to find the way here,” she went on, “but at last it was more easy, for I saw you walking with my husband, and when you left him I followed you to the house.”

“With your husband?” repeated Juliet vacantly.

“Yes—Maurice Denvil. Coming down here I hesitated more than once whether I would go back and not try to see you. But when I saw him with you, I determined, however you might receive me, to persevere. Mine is a desperate courage, Miss Vane, in coming here — bear with me—don’t be angry with me!”

“What is it you have come to say?” asked Juliet, who felt stupefied.

How quietly the blow had fallen! Was

it finished? Was there more to come? That was what she asked herself.

Mrs Denvil suddenly rose and moved with her quick, serpent-like walk to the door and opened it; she closed it again and slowly returned to Juliet.

"I was right," she said, "that—person who showed me in here was listening."

"What, Victoria! oh, impossible," said Juliet.

"She has gone now," was the answer. "Miss Vane, forgive me—I want to speak freely to you. I feel as if I can—as if I dare—as if you are true! Night after night have I visited the theatre, only to look at you; with hatred and jealousy in my heart, gnawing me and driving me mad. But I have conquered the hatred. There is goodness in you; I cannot hate you. The jealousy is the same—it is worse. I thought I must have died of it when I

saw you two together this morning. You are so lovely—it is not right you should be so lovely—so white and golden, while I am black and brown! It is cruel, when I love him so. Of course he must admire you, no one could help it; but, oh, Miss Vane, have pity on me, don't use your power! Don't let him love you!"

"I don't understand!" said Juliet, and indeed she did not quite. She kept asking herself whether she was dreaming, whether this was some vision of the night.

"Oh yes, you understand!" cried the other, her voice suddenly becoming more passionate. "Oh, try to understand me, and don't make it too hard. You know I am talking of Maurice—of my Maurice. Don't let him love you! Don't take him from me! You have all the world at your feet. You have so many to choose from! You have lovers and friends—I have

no one ; I have nothing but Maurice. And if I thought Maurice cared for another woman—if I thought he only cared for her a little, to flirt with her even—I would make him wretched all his life. But if I thought he loved another woman, Miss Vane, I should kill him—I could not help it.”

Her voice rose and fell in tragic intonations. Her face was terrible to watch, it so revealed her suffering. This was no ranting ; it was horribly real. Juliet moved a little on her chair and sighed heavily. The darkness was closing round her.

“Lately I have been mad with jealousy of you. I know I am a jealous woman ; I cannot help it ! Maurice is so handsome ; it is agony to me when he leaves me every evening to go to the theatre, knowing, as I do, that dozens of women go there only to look at him. Who could help it ? But when it came to *you*—you,

with your beauty, when I saw him take you in his arms on that stage, I felt I could spring on to it and kill him then and there. Oh, I know I am violent, it is my nature, and my trial now is more than I can bear. He told me a lie when he went to fight that duel; he said he was engaged to play in the country. Of course, I saw it all in the papers, and then I heard! My God! I heard it was about you! Oh, Miss Vane, I can't believe that—no one knows for certain—it can't be so bad as that!"

Juliet's mind went wandering back to the morning when she sat in the garden reading Denvil's letter from Ostende. How happy she was then! *Was* she in the same world now? *Was* she the same person?

"He has sworn to me it was not, and I believe him," went on the other. "Yes,

I believe him. It was some quarrel at cards, and it was only idle gossip that mixed your name up in it. But I suffered so horribly then that I knew I had not the power to suffer any more without becoming mad—evil—without committing some crime. I am not one that knows how to bear misery or neglect. And oh, Miss Vane, he has neglected me lately—I have been always alone—and I have had the terror at my heart always that he was with you—that he was learning to love you—that he was tired of me! I saw him with you this morning. I saw the admiration in his eyes. He looked at you as he always looks at you upon the stage—and I am so terrified! I cannot bear the pain if it comes!”

There was a pause; and then Juliet spoke, in a hardly audible voice. She was nerving herself during that pause to a great

effort—to saying the name that cut her like a knife as she uttered it.

“What do you want me to do, Mrs Denvil?”

“Don’t call me that—call me Linda!” cried this passionate, impulsive, excitable creature, throwing herself on to her knees by Juliet. “I like it better—for I want you to love me—not to hate me for this. Oh, if you could know how lonely I am—how friendless! I gave up everything for Maurice—family, friends, all—and now I have no one but Maurice in all the world. Oh, I love him so! I love him madly! Don’t hate me for coming to you like this! Oh, if he will but come back to me, I will be so happy!—I will be so good—and I will love and worship you all my life. But, my God, if he is deceiving me—if he has deceived me—I shall go mad. I cannot, and I will not bear it. I that have

given him my whole life! I that have no hope on earth but his love, and no wish for Heaven unless he is there and loves me still! Great God! what will become of me if he deceives me? It was strange—strange his being with you so early this morning. Miss Vane, I implore you, tell me the truth! Has he ever spoken to you of love?"

She was still on her knees, and as she grew more wildly excited she threw up her hands in her appeal to the powers above. Kneeling thus she looked into Juliet's face, waiting for her answer. Juliet, looking back, saw the agony in those appealing eyes, and a fierce momentary struggle took place in her mind. She had never told a lie in her life. She had never thought to tell one. Was she to plunge the knife into this trembling creature before her, and watch her heart's blood gush out?

She shrank back, horror-struck, from the cruelty of the deed. No, no, cried out her heart, if to lie is wicked, take the punishment for it and spare this soul! Take the pain, and the punishment too, and spare her!

“Oh, tell me!” came the despairing appeal again, in the second's pause that was filled for Juliet by this conflict between heart and conscience.

“No—no—never!” she said.

“Oh, thank you, thank you for those sweet words. You I believe as I would believe an angel, for you have the face of one.”

But, as she cried out, in her excitement of joy, Juliet fell forward into her arms. She had fainted for the first time in her life.

Linda Denvil uttered a cry of terror and concern. The door was opened so instantly that she forgot even her anxiety about

Juliet for one second, while she looked to see who had come in. It was Victoria Elwood. "Listening again," thought Mrs Denvil, who had suffered, and learned suspicion by some hard lessons. However she said nothing; she was too alarmed about Juliet, who lay in her arms like one dead.

"Have I hurt her? Have I killed her?" she asked in her passionate heart. "Oh, if my darling will but come back to me I will be her slave all my life!"

CHAPTER VI.

“Therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger
burned in him.”

It was a peculiarity of Mrs Elwood's character that she never exerted herself at moments like these; she always took up the position of a spectator. She stood now and looked on while Graham and Linda Denvil did everything that could be thought of for Juliet. Linda tenaciously kept her place, though Graham regarded her with some natural animosity as being the person who had brought about this state of affairs.

“Never, never, not even when her mother died, was Miss Juliet like this!” exclaimed Graham emphatically.

Linda hung her head, feeling very guilty.

At last, with a heavy sigh, Juliet came to herself. She opened her eyes right upon Linda's face, and closed them again.

"Dear Miss Juliet," said Graham, leaning over her; "try and come upstairs to your room. Let me help you."

Linda took the hint and stood back. Juliet made another effort, and this time with more success. She sat up and looked round at the group about her with a puzzled face. Then an agony of recollection came upon her, and she essayed to rise, feeling instantly the desire to go away and hide her pain. Graham helped her up, and she began to move to the door. But suddenly she turned and held out her hand to Linda.

"Good-bye," she said, "I am very, very glad you came to-day!"

"Miss Vane," said Linda, holding her hand close, "will you let me come and see you again?"

Juliet paused, and seemed to think very earnestly. Then she said,—

“Yes; will you come to-morrow?”

“Oh, yes, so gladly. And forgive me! And do be well to-morrow!”

“Good-bye,” repeated Juliet, and so escaped.

She went up the stairs, followed by Graham.

The two dark women were left standing in the drawing-room looking at each other. Linda Denvil was a woman of likes and dislikes; she had been completely won by Juliet; she had taken a deep dislike and distrust for Mrs Elwood.

“You seem to have brought some news that has distressed Miss Vane,” said Mrs Elwood.

“Whatever it is, I think you have made yourself pretty well acquainted with it,” answered Linda Denvil. “Good morning,” with which she took her departure.

And from that moment these two were bitter enemies.

Linda Denvil went away down the hill slowly, with a tired step; she had worn herself out. But there was a faint smile on her face; her sad eyes were brighter than they had been for many a day. "He is true to me!" she whispered to herself, "even if he admires her—of course he admires her—but he is true to me. Oh, thank God for that!"

The house she had left relapsed into a profound quiet. Mrs Elwood lunched alone; Juliet did not come down again. The servants had the idea that Juliet had been taken ill, and stole about the house, and whispered. Juliet meantime sat in the arm-chair she had been sitting in when Victoria Elwood had come to tell her of the unexpected visitor. She sat in the same chair, in the same place; she still wore the white

dress which had been her wedding-gown. A stranger might have thought her merely idle, as the hours passed by, and still she sat, without moving, her hands lying in her lap. But Graham watched her very anxiously.

But when the dinner hour came Juliet roused herself.

"It is cooler this evening, I think," she said to Graham; "I will put on a black dress."

Graham, without a word, fetched the dress, and helped Juliet to put it on. She was very glad to see her so quiet and collected; but she was puzzled by a hard look on her face which had never been there before, and by a coldness in her manner.

Juliet rejected the first black dress Graham brought her, and selected a very handsome demi-toilette of rich silk,

which made her look like a young queen.

"I did not know you expected any visitors," said Graham.

Juliet made no answer. At another time she would have answered easily as to a friend, and mentioned who was coming. She clasped round her throat a string of black pearls, which had been a much prized possession of her mother's; and, after a final critical look in the glass, swept downstairs.

Graham shook her head, standing where Juliet had left her, lost in thought.

"Poor darling," she said to herself. "Her bright youth is at an end. She's begun the battle of life. But she's as brave as a lion. I like to see that!"

Mrs Elwood, meeting Juliet at the dining-room door, glanced at her toilette and made the same remark as Graham.

“I did not know you expected visitors. I will change my dress after dinner.”

Juliet made no answer then, but began to talk about some trivial matters; she was very quiet and apparently quite tranquil. There was nothing in her manner to show that whenever she glanced at Mrs Elwood the thought in her mind was, “And you, who look so honest, can stoop to listening at doors!”

Juliet had that day passed through one of those phases of experience which cheapen all humanity.

When they were about to leave the table she said,—

“You need not change your dress, Victoria. I expect Mr Denvil this evening, and I wish to see him alone.”

Victoria, who had half-risen, sat down again and looked at her in astonishment.

“But,” she began, “what about Lord

Francis—it's understood I am always with you—”

“I intend to see Mr Denvil alone,” said Juliet. “Write to Lord Francis about it, if you like.”

She got up and went away into the drawing-room, alone, and closed the door behind her. Then she stood still and wrung her hands together. “How horrible I feel!” she said to herself. “I feel as if I could be cruel, hateful! Oh, my heart is dead!”

In another moment she recovered herself, and went to her favourite chair by the window, from whence she could see the long stretch of the garden. Her tired eyes rested gratefully on the grass and the over-blown roses.

Here Denvil found her when he arrived.

She did not move when he entered, but turned her head slowly and looked

at him. Yes, the same man who had left her this morning—with the same beautiful face and glorious eyes—the same triumphant atmosphere of youth and love about him—the same subtle fascination in every glance and movement. And over all, the brilliant look of the bridegroom! He came quickly across the room to Juliet as he entered. She put up her hand warningly.

“Take care!” she said in a low voice. “I find there are listeners in this house; and I don’t want anything of what we say overheard. Shall we go into the garden?”

“If you like,” he said, looking anxiously into her face. “Juliet, has anything happened?”

She rose and led the way into the garden, and across the grass to her hammock. A chair stood near it.

"Take that chair," she said, "and turn it round so as to have your back to the house."

"Whom are you afraid of?" he asked.

"Mrs Elwood."

"But why have you not told her—"

Juliet stopped him with a gesture.

"The secret between us has become of value to me," she said, "and I intend to keep it."

"I have never seen you like this," said Denvil; "so stately, so mysterious, so enigmatical. In Heaven's name, tell me what has happened!"

They had reached the hammock now. Juliet sank into it, her rustling silk spreading about her feet on the green grass. Denvil turned the chair as she had told him, and sat down in it. By this arrangement he was exactly facing her. He took out his cigar-case and began to light a

cigar—a mechanical attempt to place himself at his ease under the sudden disappointment of finding this stately beauty, who put him at arm's length, instead of the tender bride he had looked for.

“It is not much that has happened,” she said. “I had a visitor this morning. Your wife called on me.”

“My wife!” exclaimed Denvil, staring at her.

He held his cigar in one hand, and a flaming fusee in the other. The fusee went out, and he threw it away.

“Yes, your wife. And yet, when I look at you, it does not seem possible you can be so poor a criminal as a bigamist!”

“You are right,” said Denvil. “I have no wife—at least I had not till this morning. I have now. You are my wife, Juliet.”

She leaned forward suddenly, and looked

intently at him, her eyes shining strangely in the summer twilight.

"Is that true?" she asked.

"Absolutely true," he answered; and, striking another light, lit his cigar.

"Then who is Linda Denvil?" she asked.

"Linda!" he ejaculated. "Has she actually been here? Have you seen her?"

"Who is she?" repeated Juliet.

"She is not my wife."

"But she believes herself to be. Surely you have not deceived her in *that*?"

"Oh, dear, no. She does not believe herself to be, if it is put to her reasonably. But she has passed as my wife, and some people think she is; and so she uses my name. But she has no right to it."

"Is it possible?" said Juliet, pressing her hands together. She did not explain her words, and he did not understand them—how should he? She was marvel-

ling at the cold cruelty which could thus strip from the woman who so worshipped him the poor protection he had given her. Juliet fancied that, if she had been in his place, she would have died sooner than tell the unhappy truth to anyone.

“My dear,” said Denvil, “do you mean to tell me she made you think she was my wife?”

“She told me she was.”

“Ah, yes,” he said, “in the sight of God, as she says. No, Juliet, it is not so. I was a free man till I became your husband to-day. It was partly to spare you a scene of this kind that I was anxious to be married quickly and quietly, and go away. I dreaded it—I know how terrible she can be—”

“And is it possible,” demanded Juliet, interrupting him,—“is it possible you meant to go away and simply leave her?”

“It was the best plan I could think of. She would have seen it first in the papers then, and by the time we were back in town she would have got over it and begun to forget me. If we had had a marriage of ceremony, my terror was that she might come to the church and make a scene and a scandal. For she is like a tigress when she is roused. She might have tried to kill you.”

“And you proposed to leave her like that! How horribly she would have suffered! How she loves you! It is terrible to love like that. And I—”

She put her hand on her heart, and did not finish the sentence. The unuttered words were—“love you just as madly.” For indeed, even now she could not resist the fascinating, the subtle magnetism of his presence. Even in her misery he could make her thrill by his glance, by the

touch of his hand. He laid his hand on hers now.

“Juliet, don’t let this make you sad. It is very unfortunate, I know; I would have done anything in the world to prevent it. I know it is a dreadful thing to happen on our wedding-day. How I wish I could have saved you from it! But it is all over now—forget it. We will go away early to-morrow, and send the announcement of our marriage to the papers.”

Juliet drew her hand away, and leaned back in the hammock with a long sigh.

“Tell me,” she said, in a strangely quiet voice, “how long is it that Linda Denvil has been known as your wife?”

“Five years,” he answered, with a quick sigh—a sigh of *ennui*,—“it’s a long time, isn’t it? But don’t call her Linda Denvil. Her name is Linda Raymond. Honestly,

Juliet, I have been as good to her as I knew how. She was a married woman when I first met her, and she ran away from her husband for me. I admired her—I liked her. I gave her a home and every comfort I could give her; I did my best to make her life happy, for I knew she had sacrificed her friends, her family, her all, for me. But it was her own doing; she cannot expect my whole life in return! I could not bear to see her treated with anything but respect, so by the few people who came to our house she was believed to be my wife. I could not take her into society, but I gave up many a pleasure in order to be with her, that she should not feel her loneliness. I would have given up any thing for her—but you.”

“You have been happy with her?” asked Juliet, still in the same tranquil voice.

"Yes, as happy as a man ever is with a woman he does not love. It was all right till she began to be jealous. When she has a jealous fit she makes my life a hell; her temper becomes—well, I trust you may never see anything resembling it. A woman like that forces deceit upon one. She hated every woman I ever spoke to. When she began to be jealous of you, I could not endure it. I would not allow her to mention your name. Juliet, we have talked enough about her now. Let us settle about to-morrow."

"Go back to her," said Juliet, still lounging in the hammock quietly, "I am not going away to-morrow."

"Juliet! what do you mean?"

"I will not take you from her. I do not intend to acknowledge our marriage. I swore to her to-day that you had never spoken a word of love to me. I promised I would

never let you. I told a lie; and I must live it out. Go back to her, Maurice. I don't know what power you have to make women love you so wildly. I despise myself for suffering as I do. But the worst is over. Go back to her."

"What unintelligible nonsense are you talking," exclaimed Denvil almost roughly.

"It is quite intelligible, and quite simple," she answered.

Denvil leaned forward and caught her wrist in a grasp that made her wince with pain.

"You are my wife," he said, "and I love you. I will not be cheated. You are mine."

With these words he touched and roused all the fiery pride of Juliet's spirit.

"No, no!" she said, "I will have my freedom back. I am no chattel of yours.

And I tell you, Maurice, *I will not* be the one to stab that poor woman to the heart. She is indeed your wife in the sight of God. Go back to her."

Denvil saw his mistake, and controlled himself with an effort; for passion had almost mastered him. She had risen as she spoke, and stood before him now, looking very tall in her long black dress. He fell on his knees at her feet, and buried his face in the folds of silk that swept round her. After a moment he raised his head and looked up. Tears stood thick in those beautiful blue eyes; the sensitive mouth quivered with pain. Oh, how Juliet longed to relent and kiss that pain away! How great his power over her was! But instantly came before her a vision of that other face—of Linda's eyes with the agony in them—oh no, no, a thousand times no!

"Don't punish me too cruelly," he said. "Don't make me suffer too much. Oh, Juliet, how can I win you back?"

"You cannot," she said. "It is all over. Keep the secret between us, Maurice. For my sake, keep it. And try to make her happy. A little will satisfy her, she loves you so. Good-bye, good-bye!"

Drawing her dress gently from him she went swiftly across the lawn. She went in at the open drawing-room window, not noticing—perhaps not caring to notice in her pain—that someone drew back behind the curtain as she entered. The room was dark and she could not see well; but she quickly crossed to the door and went up to her own room.

Directly she was gone Victoria Elwood came from her hasty hiding-place behind the curtain. She lit a lamp, and sat herself down beside it with a book. Denvil

could not go away without passing through the drawing-room. She thought he would come in a moment; but he did not; so, presently she rose and looked out. It was almost dark now, and she could only just discern his figure, which was stretched at full length in Juliet's hammock.

What was he doing? As yet, he had not passed the first phase of his pain. He was cursing Linda, cursing her from his soul for thus having come between him and his love.

At last he became aware that it was getting dark, and got out of the hammock. "I can't stay *here* all night," he said to himself, then, seeing a light in the drawing-room, he quickly entered. He expected to find Juliet there, but no, it was only Victoria Elwood, apparently absorbed in a book she was reading.

CHAPTER VII.

BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT.

“WHERE is Miss Vane?” asked Denvil abruptly, after looking round the room.

He quite ignored the fact that he had not seen Mrs Elwood before; indeed he was completely oblivious of it, in his excitement, and had no intention of being rude. It was this very fact that people were rude to her without being aware of it that infuriated Victoria to such a degree. She was passed over, simply. This was especially the case, as was very natural, in the immediate circle about a beautiful woman like Juliet Vane; and it maddened her.

“She has gone to her room,” replied

Mrs Elwood, without looking up, and in the same abrupt manner he had used to her.

She was perfectly aware that Denvil had never taken the trouble since she had known him to look at her; and she hated him for it—hated him while yet she felt his power of attraction, and could not help admiring him.

“I must see her again,” said Denvil. “Will you kindly send someone to tell her so? Beg her to come down again.”

This promised to be interesting, so Victoria willingly rang the bell and sent a servant with the message. Then she returned to her book, taking no further notice of Denvil, who moved about the room with the restlessness of a man in a high fever.

The servant soon came back with a polite

message from Miss Vane regretting that she was too tired to come down again.

As soon as the maid was gone Denvil turned fiercely on Mrs Elwood.

"I don't want to make a scene," he said; "but I must and will see her. I cannot leave her like this! If she will not come down to me I shall go up to her."

Mrs Elwood put down her book and stared at him in genuine amazement. He was leaning across the table to attract her attention to what he was saying; he spoke in a low voice that carried with it a conviction of his being in earnest. And those wonderful eyes of his had a glitter in them, such as they had that night at the Players' Club when he quarrelled with Mannering.

"You must be mad, Mr Denvil," said Mrs Elwood.

"No; it is she who is mad," he answered. "Tell her so—save her from herself—tell

her to come to me, and not drive me to commit some folly we may both regret!"

Mrs Elwood leaned forward, and looked earnestly at him, her eyes very bright.

"You speak as if you had some hold over her," she said.

Denvil dropped his hand heavily on the table.

"If I have not, who should have!" he said, in a low voice, as if to himself.

"You have!—Juliet is in your power!" she exclaimed, her colour heightening as she spoke.

The thought in her mind was, "Then she is in mine, too, now I know it!"

A different mood came upon Denvil. He hardly noticed Victoria; to him she was only a person through whom he could communicate with Juliet.

He was very angry; but he was madly in love too. The love began to conquer the

anger; the yearning to drive out the rage.

“I don’t want to hurt her. I don’t want to annoy her,” he said. He left the table, and going to the mantelpiece, leaned upon it, his head on his hands, like a man utterly miserable. “But what can I do? I can’t go away like this—I love her so, I love her so! I never thought I could love any woman so! Mrs Elwood,” turning suddenly round, “will you be very good, and yourself ask Juliet to speak one word to me? Tell her I must see her. I shall go wild if I don’t.”

Mrs Elwood rose at once and went on her errand.

“He calls her Juliet! He threatens to go to her if she will not come to him! Ah, my sweet sister! My beautiful sister! The apple of her father’s eye! The future Lady Mannering!”

She went to Juliet's door, and knocked. It was opened after a moment by Graham, who came quickly out, and closed it behind her, holding the handle.

"Mrs Elwood, please send for a doctor at once. Miss Juliet is taken very ill."

"Let me go in, Graham," said Victoria.

"I daren't, ma'am. She begs and prays me to let no one else go into the room. But she must see a doctor. She can't go through the night like this!"

Mrs Elwood became affected by Graham's alarm; she went hastily downstairs again, and repeated the news to Denvil. Then love conquered anger in him completely.

"Ah, my God. this dreadful excitement has been too much for her! I'll go for a doctor myself, instantly, Mrs Elwood. Who shall I go to—can you tell me?"

He was in the hall, at the house-door,

while he spoke. Mrs Elwood hurriedly told him of a doctor whose house was only a few yards off, and he hastened away.

Within a quarter of an hour the doctor had arrived, and was upstairs in Juliet's room; the servants were hanging about in the hall, filled with consternation, for they all loved Juliet.

Denvil had gone into the drawing-room again, having made Mrs Elwood promise to come and tell him what the doctor said.

She came sooner than he expected. The doctor had politely asked her to go, for his quick eye detected that her presence irritated Juliet. Deep in her own thoughts she slowly entered the room and looked at Denvil.

"Well, you seem to have given Miss Vane a bad quarter of an hour, Mr Denvil, to judge from the state she's in. You

won't see her again to-night, that's quite certain. You had better go."

"Yes—yes—I'll go; but I must wait and hear what he says," was Denvil's reply.

"It's rather compromising for you to stay here now, I think, Mr Denvil," said Victoria. "I really think, if you want to spare her any annoyance, it would be better to go."

"You are right," said Denvil, "I am a fool. I'll go. Good-night. Try and get permission for me to see her to-morrow. I shall come down early. I must see her then."

He took his hat and went out at the open hall door.

But he did not go far. In the road, within sight of the lighted windows, he paced up and down, waiting till the doctor came out.

"Tell me," he said, in evident agita-

tion, "is it serious—is Miss Vane very ill?"

"Yes," said Dr Marchmont, "she is very ill. She appears to have suffered some sudden mental shock. I have given orders for her to be kept very quiet, otherwise there is no knowing what mischief may follow. Miss Vane is perfectly healthy, but she is like a high-strung violin; her nervous system is extremely sensitive. If anything should really shatter it, I fear her brilliant career would be at an end. Good-night." For they had reached the doctor's gate. Denvil mechanically returned his good-night, and went on down the hill, hanging his head, utterly downcast, utterly miserable. What an end to his wedding-day! And his heart ached with love for her. He longed to take her in his arms and comfort her—if only he might—if only

she would let him. Why not, why not! Why should he be shut out? She was his own, his wife. He vowed to put this miserable state of things to an end on the morrow.

He did not go home to Kensington that night. He felt it possible that if Linda provoked him he might kill her. It was better not to run the risk. He found his way to the Players' Club, and played cards till dawn—not whist, as Mannering had done in that same card-room, when he, too, was half mad with disappointment about Juliet, but poker—with a party of men who all played as if they wanted to drown thought—and drank in the same way too. In the morning light he walked home, looking years older—some of the brilliant youth had faded from his face. He let himself quietly into the house, and going straight to

his dressing-room locked himself in there.

But Linda heard him; Linda, who had lain awake all the night. She did not stir, or move, but she heard him very plainly.

Both were thinking of Juliet; both thought of her with love; and it was Juliet who separated them now more effectually than death itself could have done.

CHAPTER VIII.

“I yearn and seek.”

IT was hardly eleven o'clock the next morning when Linda entered the gate of Juliet's garden. She could not rest at home; Denvil remained locked in his room; she was wretched, and she wanted someone to talk to. Her mind ran on Juliet; and the desire to see her again took her to Putney Hill thus early in the day.

How quiet the house seemed! It looked as though the inmates were not awake yet. But they were. A maid came to the door before Linda had time to knock at it.

“Miss Vane is very ill, and the doctor does not allow her to see anyone,” was the answer to Linda's inquiry.

She was shocked and startled. She would not go away readily; for had not Juliet asked her to come to-day? She told the maid this, and persuaded her to fetch Graham. Fortunately for Linda Mrs Elwood was not yet out of bed.

Graham came down at once.

"She has been asking for you, ma'am," she said, "and I don't think there's any reason why you shouldn't see her if you wish to. It's only people that worry her, and that she doesn't want to see, that's not to go in."

Graham looked worn out. She had watched by Juliet's side all night. Linda saw that, and saw her opportunity.

"Take me up to her," she said eagerly; "and if we find she likes me to be with her, you could get a little rest."

Graham did not immediately assent; but after another look at Linda she

turned and led the way through the hall and up the stairs. Linda, without waiting any further permission, followed close behind her. She waited at the door of Juliet's room while Graham went in and spoke to her.

"Miss Juliet, the lady is here that you say you want to see; the lady that was here yesterday."

"I should like to see her, Graham. Can you help me to get downstairs? I don't seem to have any strength this morning."

"Oh, no, miss, she will come here, if you don't mind."

In another moment Linda was in the room, leaning over the prostrate, white-robed figure, which was scarcely recognisable to her at the first glance as the brilliant Juliet Vane. Juliet was as white as the wrapper she wore; all night

long she had been in a fever, and her cheeks had been like fire; now they were cold and white. Her eyes had the strangest look in them; the concentrated look of a person who can think of but one thing, and to whom that thought is agony. Her lips were dry and parched, and she wearily moved her head from side to side on her pillow; there were deep blue circles under her eyes.

"Oh, what is the matter!" said Linda, "what has happened! You are very ill!"

"Yes, I am ill," answered Juliet. "They won't tell me; but I think it's my heart. My mother died of that. I should like to, too; it is so quick and quiet."

Linda made no answer to this; to talk in the ordinary, cheering way, which people generally adopt with invalids, to this stricken creature was impossible.

She sat down on a chair by the bedside, and said,—

“May I stay with you a little while?”

“Will you?” asked Juliet with a faint smile.

This was consent enough. Juliet closed her eyes as if weary with speaking these few words. Graham, after a moment, stole quietly out of the room. Linda took off her hat and put it on a table near. Then she leaned forward and looked at the white, worn face before her. Presently Juliet opened her eyes again.

“Miss Vane!” exclaimed Linda. “Tell me, I implore you—did I make you ill like this? Was it what I said?”

Juliet looked at her, and the faint smile came again on her lips. She followed Linda's thought; she saw the frenzy of jealousy rising and battling with the pity and interest which Linda felt for her. If only Linda could have

read and understood the strange look in Juliet's eyes!"

"I have begun to lie to her," was Juliet's thought; "and I must go on; there is no escape!"

"No," she said, "oh, no, it was not that. Of course you excited me, or I should not have fainted so foolishly. I am very excitable, you know, and you seemed so much in earnest. But that was nothing. Something else happened later in the day, something altogether different, which tried me terribly. That was a trouble of my own, Linda."

"Nothing about Maurice?" said Linda, the carking jealousy at her heart making her always suspicious.

"Oh, no, no—nothing about him. Put that foolish fancy out of your mind. It is only because you have seen us together on the stage that you have thought of

such things ; and that is only acting, you know."

Her head fell back heavily on the pillow, and her eyes closed again wearily. No one could measure the effort it was to her to say these few words ; for it seemed to her, who was truth itself, that she was degrading her very soul for Linda's sake.

" Ah, but it was not all acting—not with him !" said Linda in a low voice ; " I know him so well, I know every look of his face, every glance of his eyes, and what they mean. Have I not studied them for five long years ? Oh, no, it was not all acting. He admires you ; he would love you if you let him. I know it ; how could it be otherwise ? You are so lovely ! so fair ! so beautiful ! Miss Vane, forgive me, forgive me, if I was thoughtless yesterday—if I excited you too much—you will forgive me, won't you ? I admire you so much

myself, I would not offend you for all the world. But my heart was all burning with jealousy. I dread, oh, how I dread his growing tired of me! I sit and think of it when he leaves me so much alone, and wonder if he is beginning to get tired of me. For it is but natural; he is so beautiful himself—fair—fair like you—like any fair woman—and I am so brown, dark, horrible. I hate myself when I see him look at a lovely fair woman like you. But you will never let him love you, will you—you will not take him from me—all that I have, the only thing that I have? For you, there are all the other men in the world; only not Maurice Denvil—my Maurice.”

She was kneeling now by the bedside, her face half-hidden, because there were tears on it. Juliet turned her head on the pillow, and a faint moan came from her lips. It was agony to her to hear

Linda talk like this. Suddenly Linda realised her selfishness. She sprang up.

“Oh forgive me,” she said, “I shall make you worse if I talk of myself—and the doctor will not let me come to you, and I could not bear that! But I do so want you to understand, and to forgive me. If you understand how natural, how more than natural my jealousy was, you will forgive me, you will let me be your friend. Do you know,” she went on more quietly, the fire that had kindled in her eyes dying away and giving place to her accustomed sad expression, “I have not one friend in all London, indeed in all the world, that I can talk to—not one to go to. Oh, the loneliness is awful sometimes. And when Maurice will not speak to me! He did not come home till this morning,” she said, her voice dropping to a whisper. “And he locked himself in without seeing

me. I had not seen him when I came out. Oh, it is hard to bear, hard to bear!"

Linda was holding Juliet's hand while she talked; and she felt it grow cold as it lay in her own. She looked at her in sudden anxiety. Yes, she had fainted. "Oh," lamented Linda to herself, "I deserve to be sent away and never to see her again!" She quietly did all she could to restore her, fearful every moment lest Graham should return, and, finding things in this state, send her away. But fortune favoured her; Juliet had recovered and opened her eyes, with that faint smile which seemed like the ghost of the brilliant smile that used to light her face like sunshine, before Graham came back. Everything was quiet then; Juliet lying still on her pillow, and Linda sitting by her, holding her hand.

"Graham," said Juliet presently, "I want to speak to Mrs Elwood alone. Ask

her to come to me, and take Mrs Denvil downstairs for a little while."

"You are not fit to see her, Miss Juliet," said Graham. "She worries you."

"I have something to say to her, Graham, and I must say it."

This was decisive. Graham was accustomed to obey without protest when Juliet was in earnest.

Linda rose and went with Graham out of the room.

"I will go into the garden for a little while," she said. "I should like to see Miss Vane's garden."

Graham showed her the way, and then went to look for Mrs Elwood. She was very grave and sad. She was walking among mysteries that were not explained to her; but she understood enough to see that Juliet was placed in some terrible position which was taxing

her beyond her strength. Juliet had asked her not to let Mrs Denvil know that Maurice had been there in the evening. Graham acquiesced without saying anything; she was one of those rare, invaluable servants who can be trusted with a secret without requiring it to be given them in detail.

What troubled her most was to see Juliet's beauty laid low like this. "If she had to act to-night!" she said to herself. "It's not right for anyone that has to work to be able to feel!"

She found Victoria reading, and smoking a cigarette.

"Juliet wants to see me!" she exclaimed. "Why, last night she couldn't bear me in the room! Of all the changeable people—well, I'm ready. I'll come now."

And she threw away her cigarette.

CHAPTER IX.

STRIKING A BARGAIN.

“GOOD-MORNING, Miss Vane; are you better? You asked for me?”

“Yes, I have something I want you to do for me if you will.”

“I am at your service,” said Victoria, a little sullenly.

“It is a little thing—but it is important,” said Juliet. She passed the lace handkerchief, which she had crushed in her hand, over her lips before she went on. “I am anxious to spare Mrs Denvil some unnecessary suffering. I do not wish her to know that Maurice Denvil has been visiting here so much of late, or that he was here last night—” she paused.

Victoria, regarding her steadily with her direct gaze, finished the sentence for her,—

“Or that he is in love with you.”

“If you like to put it so; yes,” answered Juliet, knowing there was nothing else to be said.

“*I* don’t put it so; I only use his own words. He was kind enough to give me that gratuitous information last night, after your scene with him. So you don’t want Mrs Denvil to know—you want to spare her some unnecessary suffering?”

“Yes,” replied Juliet.

“I suppose you realise,” said Victoria, “that he may be here now at any moment and encounter her. Do you want me to keep them apart?”

“Yes,” was all Juliet could say. She had not yet thought of that danger.

“Do you want her not to know when he comes?”

“Oh, she must not know, if it can be helped. Let them tell him at the door I am ill and can see no one.”

“I should not fancy, if he is not strangely altered since last night, that he is likely to take that answer and go tamely away. I believe he will see you to-day at any cost. He is capable of coming up to you. He threatened to do so last night.”

Juliet clasped her hands in horror. The mere thought of such a scene made her heart beat wildly.

“You had better see him and tell him I will write to him as soon as I have strength; but that I have said all I have to say. But don't let him stay. If she is here don't let her run the risk of seeing or hearing him.”

“She is out in the garden now, and any moment he may arrive and be shown

into the drawing-room. I had better go down and send her up to you again. And you had better let her go away as soon as possible. Now, if I undertake to keep your secrets and manage this affair for you—and very embarrassing it is to have to run the risk of husband and wife meeting in this way—will you do something for me?”

“If I can.”

“Oh, yes, you can do it easily. It's only a matter of business. I am tired of a life with so little occupation in it. I want work, and affairs to attend to. Imagine, if, as you told me, you don't want me to travel with you, the emptiness of my existence left behind here! And I ought to be doing something for myself—something for my future. If you will help me, if you will go into it with me, I can do it.”

"If it's within my power to help you I will do it," answered Juliet.

"Very well, then, I'll take that as a promise; for I know it's within your power. I won't talk about it any more at the moment, for I must attend to your affairs. I'll go and send Mrs Denvil up to you, and then I'll lie in wait for her husband. But take my advice and send her away as soon as possible."

Juliet said nothing further. She lay still, with that agonised look in her eyes and watched Mrs Elwood leave the room and close the door. Then she found just enough strength to turn and bury her face in the pillow. It was horrible to have to confide in Victoria Elwood, especially with a half confidence. But still she was glad that Victoria had struck an open bargain and put the matter on a business basis. It would have been much harder

if she had, as Juliet had feared she would, exacted more confidences, asked innumerable questions, and put herself on the footing of a friend who had a right to know everything. This had been Juliet's dread; for, of late, she had begun to see Victoria's character more plainly than she had done, and shrank from her. Nothing that she could personally have gained by it would ever have induced her to ask Victoria's assistance and confide in her as she had done now. But she was now in the terrible condition of the unhappy creature who, having told a lie, is obliged to submit to any miseries rather than have it discovered. The consequences are just as difficult, and just as dreadful, though the lie be told for no personal gain, but to shield or save another.

Victoria, in the moments she had stood by Juliet's bedside, after she understood

what she was wanted for, exercised all her naturally quick intelligence to see how she might best use the situation to her own advantage. She decided to forego her curiosity, to put all else on one side, and simply carry out Juliet's wishes for the sake of what she had been secretly longing for for a long time—an independent start in life. She was weary of taking orders; she wanted to give them. She was realising the fact very keenly, that she was one of those women who must bargain and fight for all the independence and pleasure they get in life; and she meant to do so. The chance, she thought, had come. She determined to take it the instant she saw but a gleam of it. So Juliet had secured a trusty emissary for the moment.

In a few moments Linda returned, with her soft step; she came in smiling, radiant,

a bunch of roses in her hand. Juliet turned her face to look at her. Yes, it was some faint reward to see those smiles—some faint reward for all the agony. How bright she looked! For Linda, out in the garden, had talked to herself and resolved to throw away her own sadness and miserable anxieties, and be her brightest self for Juliet's sake. Juliet understood, as she lay and looked at her, that Maurice might have loved her, though he said he had not. Juliet did not yet know that men forget a love that has passed, and fancy it has never existed; but instinct told her that it must have been love once with these two—perhaps not—surely not such love as between herself and Maurice—no, her tortured heart cried out in protest against that thought. That was the one reservation that she could never surrender. She would not believe it possible that he

ever loved another woman as he loved her.

In this she was right. The passion which Maurice Denvil felt for her swept away everything else from his heart and mind. It was the one grand passion of his life. It was difficult for him now to believe he had ever cared for Linda Raymond. But Juliet, seeing her in her present state, understood how possible it was that he had—once—long ago. She herself began to love her; for Linda had a wonderful power of charming when she chose. Her caresses were subtle, serpentine, different from anything Juliet had ever known. Never had Juliet been so susceptible to tenderness as now; and Linda lavished it on her. It was what she needed; and she could not bring herself to send away this soft, strange creature, who clung to her and kissed her so gently, yet with such warmth. Her

presence made the weary hours pass more quickly, gave the aching head and tired eyes a little rest. Graham saw that when Linda was in the room Juliet was quieter, and was glad of it; but Mrs Elwood, downstairs, on guard, was fretting and fuming over this admission of a stranger to a sick-room from which she had been dismissed.

A false tranquillity had fallen upon Juliet, born of the exhaustion of intense feeling. She lay silent, worn out, her hands in Linda's, who every now and then covered them with kisses. It seemed to her as if her life was over, and she lay in her grave, mourned by a stranger. This was better than the acute pain which had prostrated her; it was easier to bear. She thought with longing of her mother's death, and pictured to herself how blessed it would be when eternal rest came to her in the

same swift way, and she would no longer feel the throbbing of her tortured heart.

It was early in the afternoon when this false peace was broken. Linda had begun to think she must return to her own home, and was about to try and slip away from Juliet without rousing her from what seemed like a trance rather than sleep, when Graham came into the room with a little note in her hand. She came to Juliet and gave it her quietly.

"From Mrs Elwood, Miss," she said. "She is anxious you should read it at once."

In an instant the calm was broken, and the wild look came on Juliet's face again. She drew away from Linda to read it. Only a few words scrawled hastily in pencil.

"He is here, and refuses to go away

without seeing you. What am I to do?"

Juliet's hand closed on the note, and she lay thinking with an intensity that showed in her face. What should she do? What could she do?

The first pangs of remorse for her own act came upon her now. She felt that she would rather die a thousand deaths than that Linda should know how she had lied to her! The humiliation would be too awful, even though that lie had been told for Linda's sake. Oh, if it had been possible to save her in any other way! Useless!—it had been done, and now the misery must be lived out to the end.

"Please bring me my writing-case," she said to Graham presently. Graham brought it, and with an effort she raised herself. Linda instantly flew to her help, and raised her in her arms. Juliet had not known

this kind of tenderness since her mother's death, and it touched her to the quick. In spite of her beauty, her fame, her success, she was lonely in her own home. She had no real friend at hand but Graham. Maurice lost, she had no one. And here were these tender arms wound round her, a soft cheek was pressed to hers, a gentle voice encouraged her. It was sweet; it came like rain on parched land. Juliet turned her face to Linda and kissed her, looking up at her with eyes which, could Linda have fathomed the mystery of their meaning, would have cut her heart in two.

"Sit there a moment, while I write," said Juliet, pointing to a chair a little way off. And then she wrote her message to Maurice Denvil.

"Linda is here with me. I cannot see you now—you know it is impossible. I

will come downstairs this evening, if you like to return then. But why? I have said my last word.

“JULIET VANE.”

She sealed this, and enclosed it in an envelope addressed to Mrs Elwood, writing inside merely, “Give him this.”

Graham took the letter from her, and Juliet sank back exhausted.

“You are so weary!” said Linda, “I had better go now; perhaps I have been here too long.”

“Oh, not this moment!” cried Juliet, in an agony of apprehension. “Don’t go this moment—wait a little while!”

She caught Linda’s hand and kept it in her own. If Linda should go, and meet him in the house, and know that his being there had been hidden from her! Her suspicious heart would tell her

of the whole deception, if once she saw a part of it. Juliet held her fast—and waited.

She had to wait a long time. At last Victoria herself entered the room, and Juliet read in her face the assurance that Denvil was gone. She released Linda's hand; and Linda, whose conscience was pricking her about so long an absence from her home, took Victoria's appearance as giving her an opportunity to leave Juliet.

Juliet let her go now without any protest, and Linda hastened away, little thinking that she was close behind Maurice, who also went straight home.

"Here's a letter from him," said Victoria, giving it to Juliet as soon as Linda was gone. "I thought he would never have done writing it. I thought he never would go. You have given me no easy task, I can tell you."

Juliet opened the letter, read it, and let it fall by her side. It was very short though it had taken so long to write.

“And you can sign yourself to me, Juliet Vane! You, who are Juliet Denvil! It is more than I can bear. Don't drive me too far. I shall come this evening.

“MAURICE.”

“Have you decided who you are going to travel with on tour?” asked Victoria, after a little pause.

Juliet had forgotten the tour! And it was scarcely a week off now. She hesitated.

“Miss Luton, if I go,” she said, after a moment. “But I do not think I shall go.”

“Not go!” exclaimed Victoria in utter

amazement. "But you cannot help going. You are under a contract."

"If I am ill I can't go," said Juliet.

"Dr Marchmont says you will be yourself in a day or two, if you keep quiet. Of course, if you have any more exciting scenes with Denvil, it is another matter. Heywood will make you pay a fine forfeit."

"I suppose so!" said Juliet, to whom this aspect of the matter had not yet presented itself. She made no comment, but her mind paused over her available resources. They were not great—her mother's black pearls, and some diamonds of her own. She could command a few hundreds. But she had no means of knowing what Heywood's forfeit might be judged to be, and she felt that here she might perhaps be trapped and unable to free herself. Her one aim was to avoid playing with

Denvil—not to see him again after this evening, and so, if live she must, live down this fatal passion, which, bitter-sweet, tore her through and through.

She had not Lord Francis to turn to to make a bargain for her. And she knew, only too well, that if he were there, he would not help her in this case. No, she had to fight it out alone. Alone—was she always to be alone, and always fighting, now? Yes, as those are whose first love is sullied, whose faith is wrecked.

“Talk to me now about your scheme, or whatever it is,” she said; not because she felt any interest in it, but to give Victoria something else to talk about than her own affairs.

“I want to start a dressmaking business,” said Mrs Elwood briefly. “I have been thinking about it ever since I have been in London, and I feel sure I could

make a success of it. If you will back me up, and let me use your name, I am certain of success. You see I am entirely unknown here, whereas everyone knows you."

"A dressmaking business," said Juliet languidly. "What an odd idea."

"Ah, it seems so to you, because you go about so little. When I go shopping I notice everything; and I see ladies going into business, and making fortunes at it too, on every side. I have considerable business faculty. I don't pretend to taste; but that can be always bought or hired. You can scarcely imagine, I daresay, in your busy life, what it is for a woman with energy like myself to be without an occupation and without a future!"

"It must be very hard," said Juliet gently, though she was scarcely listening.

But she had enough natural sympathy in her to see that such a life must be lacking in the keen interest which had belonged — hitherto — to such a career as her own.

“I would like to get up and dress soon, if you will please call Graham,” she said, deserting the dressmaking business and Victoria’s future with such suddenness as to show her thoughts were far enough away from these subjects. “I am coming down before the evening.”

“Dr Marchmont said you were not to come down to-day!”

“It is no use. I cannot help it. I have to see Mr Denvil again this evening.”

Victoria’s face showed her consternation. Just now Juliet was her sole gold-mine, and she did not at all want her to get ill. Dr Marchmont had told them all that her heart was too weak to admit of

her being subjected to any violent excitements.

“And alone?” asked Victoria, after a moment’s pause.

“Alone,” was the decided answer.

“Well,” she said after another pause of disgust, “if my health was as important as yours is, I wouldn’t run such risks.”

“It can’t be helped,” said Juliet, with a sigh.

“Is it part of my business to leave you two alone again this evening?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you must help me start for myself, that’s certain; for directly Lord Francis comes back, I shall be dismissed.”

With which final statement she went off to fetch Graham.

CHAPTER X.

“I shall be ever maiden.”

WHEN Denvil came in the evening, he found Juliet lying on a couch in the drawing-room, in a white wrapper. She was not the stately beauty of last night. No, she was changed. Her proud beauty had yielded before the exhaustion, which had prostrated her; she looked delicate, fragile; but to Denvil's eyes more lovely than ever. Full of vigorous strength himself, with only an appearance of effeminacy cast over his health and vigour, like a thin veil, this fragile loveliness was even more attractive to him than the rich grace of perfect well-being which had always characterised Juliet before.

He gave her one long scrutinising look, and then fell on his knees by the side of her couch, burying his face in the folds of her muslin robe.

“I see it in your beautiful, saddened eyes, my dear!” he said, after a moment, looking at her again. “You love me just the same! Just the same. Is it not so? Tell me the truth?”

The truth! How sweet it seemed to Juliet to be able to tell the truth after so many lies.

“I love you more!” she answered in a low voice of pain. “That is what hurts me so; for I despise you, and I despise myself for loving you still—and more. Oh, Maurice, it is awful! Don’t keep me in this agony. Tell me what you want with me, and let me be alone with my pain.”

“What I want with you! I want *you*.” He drew back as if offended; but her eyes

hungrily followed him, and he came close again. "Put an end to this farce, Juliet; it will be better for everybody! Come away with me, and let everyone know we are married. When we come back they will all be used to it."

"And Linda will be dead—or mad."

What could he say? He could think of nothing to say. An impatient ejaculation which rose to his lips he silenced, and took some credit to himself for doing so. This was natural enough. Any man in his position, and who had been reared in the same atmosphere, would have felt as ill-used as he did. And the worst of it was, for him, that his heart was not hardened to Linda; he was sorry for her, but he wanted to escape both from her love and her rage, and it seemed to him still that a quick cut of the knife, such as he had planned, would be the best. After a silence,

in which he went over the whole ground in his mind, he said,—

“Mad—yes—with anger. But it would pass.”

Juliet looked at him wonderingly.

“Is it possible,” she said, “that you don’t realise her love for you?—that you don’t see she feels herself to be your wife?”

“Why do you go over all this?” said Denvil in a tone of pain. “It belongs to the past.”

“And the future!” said Juliet. “You cannot separate them.”

“You seem determined I shall not!” he answered, a little bitterly.

“Yes, I am determined. It is the best, the only plan. I believe our marriage can be cancelled—can it not? I don’t know for certain—it was because I wanted to know that I was resolved to see you to-

night. If it can be it must be; and you must marry Linda."

"No, that I swear I will not," exclaimed Denvil violently. "Neither will I give you up. My dear, you do not understand your position. You are mine. I can claim you. The law would give you to me."

A sort of shudder passed through Juliet's whole figure.

"Oh, is it so!" she said almost in a whisper. "I feared it!"

"Yes, it is so," answered Denvil. "There is no way out of the position for you. If only you could believe that it will be best to go right on as if you had never seen Linda. Of course, you never ought to have seen her. This sort of thing happens every day, and usually no one knows anything about it."

"I hate to hear you talk like that!" said Juliet. "It makes me feel that some

day you would leave me in the same way, though I was your wife."

"You don't know how beautiful you are," was all his reply.

She sighed. Already she was beginning to taste of the curse of beauty. What pleasure had hers brought her? Some—yes; but pain too, and plenty of it. She was thinking hard how best to carry her point. She felt she was not being successful; Denvil had a strong position and meant to keep it. She decided to try another plan.

"If you really care for me," she said, "you will help me in this dreadful affair, and not make it harder for me. I have no one to turn to, no one to speak to, but you."

She had touched the right chord now. He was on his knees again, at her side, in a moment.

"You know you can do what you will

me," he said; "only tell me what you want. But I must have your love!—I cannot live without that!"

"You have it," she said. "You know you have it. Oh, Maurice, you have taken it, and my life with it! There is nothing I care to live for but you! It is cruel."

His arms were round her; but she put him back.

"No! no!" she said, "that is impossible. It is all over—all at an end. Remember that Linda has been here all day—Linda has been kind to me—she has been sweet and good—no one has been like that to me since my mother died. I cannot, and I will not injure her. For her sake I have told lies and stooped to deception. I would die sooner than she should know it. Well might she lose her faith in God and man alike if she should know how I had deceived her! Maurice, I implore

you, by your love for me, help me—do not oppose me!”

“What do you want me to do—don’t make it something beyond human endurance!”

“Go back to Linda, and let me have her friendship—and yours. If nothing better can be done, let that ceremony of marriage remain always a secret between us two. You will soon be going on tour; take Linda with you. I mean to break my contract, and not go. I will go to America. If we never meet it will all be easy—”

Denvil broke in upon her words suddenly—a sharp dread had cut through him like a knife.

“Juliet,” he cried out, “there is no one else! You have not changed? You don’t want to escape me?”

“No, no!” she answered, in great

agitation, "I swear to you if you will do this for love of me there will never be anyone else. I shall be true to you. I shall never forget that we were married in that church. No, no, you cannot doubt me. You know only too well I can never care for anyone else on this earth. My love for you is too great, my life is given to you. I shall live in the memory of our love. Oh, if anyone should hear us. Go quickly to the door, Maurice, and see if anyone is there. I told Mrs Elwood to keep away to-night, but it is impossible to trust her."

Denvil obeyed. The hall was empty. Victoria had a certain business-like code of honour. She considered that now, in this matter concerning Denvil, she was at Juliet's command. She had been told to leave them alone, and she did so.

The little break gave him time to think,

and when he returned to her he attacked the one weak point in what she had said.

“You can’t break your contract with Heywood. He would immediately go to law with you, and as you have absolutely no excuse to offer, he would be awarded a fine too heavy for you to pay.”

“I am afraid of that,” said Juliet; “but I am going to try. Maurice, I cannot play ‘Evangeline’ with you any longer! I should die some night in that love-scene—I am certain of it!”

“My dear, give up all these foolish ideas, and acknowledge our marriage at once. Linda is provided for; the house is hers, I gave it to her; and she has enough to live on. She will suffer, of course; but suffer she must, sooner or later; she does now with her ceaseless jealousy. Let us put an end to the whole misery by acting sensibly.”

He took her hand and looked earnestly at her. She was very quiet. He almost thought he had gained the day. But he had not affected her at all. She was simply thinking over the difficulties she had to face on every side.

“Come, dear,” he said, after watching her for a moment, “make up your mind to that. Come away with me early to-morrow morning; you will soon forget this wretchedness.”

“Ah!” cried Juliet, “how little you understand. How could I forget Linda, knowing her as I do? How could I be happy if I deceived her so cruelly. No, Maurice, I am resolved. You must go back to her. Leave me to fight out my own difficulties; I see you will not help me. But do that one thing to show your love for me.”

Denvil drew away from her. A sullen

look clouded the brightness of his face. He got up and walked about the room a little while before he spoke again. Then he came and stood by her, and spoke in a hard voice.

“If I do, Juliet—if I do, to please you only—it will be for no other reason but that you demand it—take your share. Don’t go away and not see your own work. You value Linda’s friendship—take it—I should like you to see what kind of life mine is with her.”

Juliet looked at him in wonder, but a sudden resolution came to her.

“I will,” she said, “I will know you both better than I do now.”

“Very well. I agree to that purgatory for a while. I think you will alter your opinion of things before long.”

Very little more was said. Denvil had fallen into a dark, sullen humour, and did

not attempt to shake it off. He felt cruelly ill-used, and saw no reason to hide it. He considered he was allowing his love to be tested to the utmost limit of human capacity by submitting to Juliet's quixotism; and he intended her to realise this. Nevertheless, in his own heart he believed he had gained the day. It was only a matter of time, now, to his mind, and a few painful and annoying scenes, and all would be settled as he wished. "All this fuss might be saved," he thought to himself, "if Juliet would only be sensible. But it seems there is no help for it." And, looking at her, he felt that her beauty and his passion for her made him forget and forgive everything she made him suffer.

CHAPTER XI.

“Fool, faint not thou in thy strong heart.”

JULIET slept quietly that night, and awoke in the morning more like herself. Youth and health were strong in her.

The first thing she did was to write a letter to Heywood, and send a messenger with it, with orders to find him and bring back an answer. Then she ordered the carriage to be ready for her as soon as the messenger should return.

Her letter had been very brief, simply saying that she did not wish to go on the tour, and would prefer to break her contract rather than do so; asking whether any arrangement could be made for her release.

Heywood's answer was still more brief. It ran thus:—

“DEAR MADAM,—I will call on you this evening in reference to what you ask.—
Yours truly, ARTHUR HEYWOOD.”

Juliet dropped the note when she had read it with a gesture of consternation. Her heart sunk. She knew enough of Heywood, and enough of life now, to guess that he intended to say something which he did not care to put on paper. She began to feel like a hunted creature, looking on every side for some dangerous trap. And she would be free from all this if she had neither genius nor beauty! For one wild moment she wished she had neither. But that passed. She did not value her beauty—she was too rich in it, and too young to know its value; but she was beginning to realise that when her heart had suffered to the utmost her genius might be a consolation. With the re-awakening of

her natural vigour came the desire for work. If she could act away from Denvil it might enable her to put him out of her mind, at least for part of every day; it would fill a little of the great, empty void which life now seemed to her without him. Perhaps, just possibly, she told herself, Heywood might have some exchange to suggest to her which would not involve a breach of her contract. This hope gave her new life.

"Do you want me to come with you?" asked Victoria, when Juliet came down dressed to go out.

She now made a point of consulting Juliet always, evidently considering that her allegiance to Lord Francis was for the time being at an end.

"No," said Juliet, "I am taking Graham. But I want you with me this evening, Mrs Elwood. Mr Heywood is coming, and I should like you to be present all the time."

"Very well," said Victoria. "Will you give me a lift into town, and I will take a cab back. I am going to look for a shop."

"Certainly," said Juliet. "Where do you want to go?"

"Put me down at the top of Bond Street, if that is not out of your way."

It was, considerably; but Juliet did not care to own it. They drove to Bond Street, and then Victoria said, as she got out,—

"Where shall I tell him to go?"

Juliet gave her the name of a shop in Regent Street. Here she executed some small commission, and then told the coachman to drive to Linda's house, at Kensington. Why she did not care for Victoria to know she was going there she would have found it hard to explain. In truth, the feeling was a compound one. Partly

she felt as if Mrs Elwood already knew too much about her affairs ; indeed, she would have sacrificed a great deal not to have been obliged to trust her at all. And, partly, she shrank from any criticisms on what she was doing. She knew she was being quixotic, and, perhaps, making a mistake ; and yet she felt drawn to that Kensington house by an impulse too strong for her to resist.

“I will get to know him,” she said to herself ; “through Linda’s life I shall find out what he really is.”

At the house she got out, and went up the steps herself to knock at the door ; leaving Graham to wait for her in the carriage.

Linda herself opened the door. She was radiant, and looking her brightest ; indeed, she looked ten years younger than when Juliet had first seen her.

“I saw you!” she cried, “and flew downstairs to open the door for you. Oh, I am so glad to see you. How good of you to come! Are you strong enough? Are you sure it is right? Come in here and sit down. I shall get you some wine instantly. Oh, how frightened I should be if you were to faint here. Have you your maid with you? Yes—oh, that is right, I am glad. Drink this wine—you must, for you are pale. Pale! imagine Juliet Vane pale, she who is like a rose! How proud I am to have you here! and how lovely you are! Ah, now some of the rose colour is coming back. What do you suppose I was doing? Making preparations to go away! Why do you think I am so happy to-day? Because I am going with Maurice! Ever since the tour was decided on I have begged and begged him to take me with him, and he always

said no. It broke my heart to think of being left here all alone — and it made me mad with jealousy to think he should be so determined to go without me, for I knew you were going and would see him every night. Oh, how could I bear the thought! It was too cruel! Last night when he came home I asked him again, and, to my amazement, he said yes! Not very graciously—I know he does not want me—but never mind, I am to go! I shall be with him, I shall see him, the light of my eyes! I am so happy to-day—so happy—I feel sure I shall be able to be very good all the time we are away, and not even be jealous of *you*. Oh, how I wish I were clever like *you*. I think, then, Maurice might love me better. But no, I won't even let myself wish I was different; to-day—I am too happy!"

Linda talked gaily on, in her own peculiar,

impulsive, excitable way, attributing Juliet's silence and quickly-changing colour to her illness. Juliet was startled at this new phase — at the idea of Linda's going with the company — if she could have formed any idea of the scene which resulted in Denvil's saying "Yes," she would have been still more startled. She tried to conquer her agitation — to tell herself that now she had begun her difficult task she must go through with it quietly. But it was hard, here, in Denvil's own home—for the first time in his surroundings — and listening to Linda's gay, glad talk.

Linda Raymond's nature was more like a tropical climate than anything else which God has created. She was always impassioned, always in extremes; when she desired to please, her subtle sweetness, her "soft strange ways," were wonderful and fascinating; when she was pleased she was

bright like sunshine. Juliet had seen only these two phases, and she thought Linda the most charming creature she had ever known. It seemed extraordinary that Denvil should weary of her, and should wish to free himself from her.

Juliet's strange experience involved a mental exercise which she had not thought of, but which now began to bewilder her. She must of necessity, knowing these two as she did now, be forced constantly to look at the opposite sides of a question. It is hard work to look at the two sides of a question of no great importance, even for a moment; imagine, then, the effort of regarding them constantly, and in a matter so vital as this.

When with Denvil, though she struggled against it, and clung tenaciously to her resolution not to injure Linda, still it seemed perfectly natural that she herself,

Juliet, should have won his love, and be the sole arbiter of his fate. But the moment she was with Linda it seemed monstrous, unnatural, horrible!

“I want you to see all my little house,” went on Linda, who had a very keen pride in her own belongings. “It is my very own—Maurice gave it me, one day when he was very kind. Oh, how I wish there were more of those days now! Come, if you are not too tired.”

Juliet rose—it was easier to walk about and look at things, than to sit and listen to the bright talk which was continually full of words that smote her to the heart. If Linda did but know! If she could but know! she kept on saying to herself.

She had a painful desire, too, to see the house which had been Denvil's home for five years. They left the dining-room,

where they had first entered, and went upstairs.

“I can't show you the room Maurice studies in,” said Linda sorrowfully. “It is locked up to-day. If he could but know how jealous that key makes me!—how I suffer at the thought that he has letters there he dreads my seeing!”

So they went up to Linda's drawing-room. Juliet paused inside the doorway; she scarcely seemed able to breathe. The room was nothing but an altar for the worship of Maurice Denvil. On an easel, just opposite the door, stood a head of him in oils, done by an eminent painter—life-like, with the dreamy, fascinating smile upon the eyes and mouth. A profile, in pastels, hung upon the wall at one side; on another was a long frame filled with a whole row of cabinet photographs of him, in all sorts of costumes, in innumerable attitudes.

Linda looked round, smiling triumphantly.

“Do I not know how to worship my idol?” she demanded. “Ah, and it is a worship! Sometimes I dress that portrait with wreaths of flowers or garlands of leaves. I love to see his smiling eyes look out from among them. Oh, what eyes they are! Did ever you see any so beautiful? No, stop—don’t say you admire them. I can’t bear it—No one has a right to admire him but me!—Think what I have suffered when I feel like that, and know that he is idolised by all the women who go to that theatre every night! Oh, it is awful! You must pity me when you think of it. But you do pity me, I know. I can never tell you the luxury it is to have someone to talk to—I am always alone when Maurice is away, and eat my heart out thinking of him, and wondering where he

is. Sit here in this large chair, and let me sit by you. Oh, it is sweet to have a friend. You will let me call you that, won't you?"

"I want you to!" said Juliet, with a sharp sigh.

She sank into the big chair, and Linda came and perched herself on its arm, and put her arms round her. What a clinging, loving thing she was, thought Juliet. There was something strange and fiery in the clasp of the thin brown hands, in the pressure of the slender body, which was so supple.

"This is Maurice's favourite chair," said Linda; "and when I lean over him like this, he says I wind about him like a serpent."

Yes, that was it—that was what Linda reminded her of; but the picture Linda's words brought up hurried her into such a

flood of feeling that she lost all power of thought. She knew that she had tried her powers as far as she dared for that day. She was filled with a sudden terror that Maurice would come in and find her there, and that one, or both, would be deserted by all presence of mind. It would be terrible to meet before Linda! Juliet had not yet faced the fact that sooner or later she must do so, if she was not able to break her contract. The very thing she dreaded so much happened instantly, as so often it does when we are filled with an inexplicable terror, which seems to come like the shadow of the event.

The drawing-room door opened, and Denvil stood on the threshold of the room. He had let himself quietly into the house with his latch-key, and had come gloomily upstairs, intending to go to his own room without seeing Linda if possible. But the unusual

sound of voices attracted his attention, and some impulse made him look into the room.

For one second Juliet hardly knew him. She had never seen his face with that heavy gloom on it, which seemed to hide all the youth and glow. He looked at her in stupid surprise at the first glance—then, seeing who it was, his whole face lit up—the cloud lifted, and was gone—he made a quick step forward, and for a moment of awful apprehension Juliet thought he was going to throw himself at her feet, or clasp her in his arms, or some other terrible wild thing. But the moment passed—he remembered Linda in time.

Juliet, with the talent of an actress, was able to summon all her self-possession for this critical moment, and spoke a few common-place words of greeting in her ordinary manner. It took Denvil a little longer to recover himself, and even then he was per-

ceptibly nervous. He was unmanned by his love for Juliet, and a dread of which she knew nothing, nor, as yet, had any means of guessing at.

But she was surprised, when she turned to speak to Linda, to be met with an icy coldness and a face entirely altered. Was this the Linda who, a moment ago, was so loveable? It seemed scarcely credible. And was Denvil's entrance to the room enough to produce so great a change? When Juliet saw this, and thought of the gloomy air with which Denvil had entered, her heart sank within her at this picture of domestic life! She rose to go as soon as it was possible, and no one tried to detain her. Denvil looked at her helplessly, and Linda shook hands with her almost silently, and with a cold hand. Denvil accompanied her to the carriage. They had to wait a moment for it on the steps, as the coach-

man was walking the horses up and down. In this moment Denvil spoke.

“Do you know,” he said, “that I am almost physically afraid to go back into the house? I was in terror lest the storm should break while you were there, and yet I half hoped it would. I think it would cure you once and for all of this folly.”

“What do you mean? What changed her so?”

“She is always like that when there is another woman in the room. It was worse than usual to-day, because she saw my love for you in my face—I could not help it—the sight of you was unexpected. Juliet, if you will let me get into your carriage and drive away, I will never come back to this house again—never—the two parts of my life will be cut for ever in twain.”

The carriage had driven up.

“Good-bye,” said Juliet, faintly, and

quickly got in and shut the door. "Good-bye," she said again. "Home," she said to the coachman; and so was driven off, and Denvil was left standing on his own doorstep.

CHAPTER XII.

NO WAY OF ESCAPE!

AT dinner Juliet and Mrs Elwood met again. Juliet was quiet, worn-out, subdued; but Mrs Elwood was excited. She had found, as she considered, the very thing she wanted; a shop which was so well situated that its situation alone would ensure success.

“There’s no good in not doing things properly,” said she, enthusiastically. “If I begin at all I will begin well. Oh, how I long to be at work! I suppose there is thorough plebeian blood in me—I feel that in business I shall be quite at home. I wish I was not a nobody—it must be delightful to have a name that everyone

knows—it acts like magic. Mrs Elwood could not even hire a shop in a good street; but Miss Juliet Vane's manager can do anything! All the world knows Miss Juliet Vane can coin as much money as she likes.”

She spoke bitterly, but with a purpose at the same time; and watched Juliet keenly while she spoke. She was much engaged at present in testing Juliet's business faculties; which she found were practically *nil*. They were less active than usual at present, for all her thoughts were with her own difficulties. But at Victoria's last words she roused herself a little.

“You've not settled anything?” she said, quickly.

“No, I can't, you know, without you. The landlord wants to see you.”

“Ah, well, we shall know this evening, after I have seen Mr Heywood, whether I go on coining money or not. I may as

well tell you I want to leave him and go to America."

"You would coin money twice as fast there with your London reputation! If you decide to do that, will you take me with you? I'd sooner start business in New York."

Juliet agreed without comment. She was thinking deeply over her coming interview with Heywood, and wondering what would be the result of it. She had not long to pass in suspense. Heywood arrived soon after dinner. Mrs Elwood was struck by his evidently careful toilet, and the marked sweetness of his smile, and wondered, like Juliet, what was in the mind of this formidable person. Indeed, he was formidable to anyone who had to deal with him in business, and who had not, like Lord Francis, the whip hand of him. His peculiar temperament gave him an immense advan-

tage; it was impossible to guess what his mode of attack would be, and equally impossible to fight him with his own weapons. All Juliet could do was to say plainly what she wanted, as indeed she had already briefly said in her letter, and then wait to see how he took it.

Mrs Elwood, who remained in the room, took up a book when they began to talk.

"Such a suggestion, at so late a date, is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of," said Heywood. "Of course, you understand that your contract with me is absolutely legally binding?"

"Yes, I understand that," said Juliet.

"And the tour begins now in five days. After your success in London they will not accept 'Evangeline' in the provinces without you. Besides, at all the theatres where our dates are fixed your name is billed. Perhaps

you don't realise what this means, Miss Vane."

"I think I do," said Juliet.

"Of course, if you were dying, it would be another matter; but you have absolutely no excuse to offer for this extraordinary whim."

"None that I care to make public."

"But you are quite determined?"

"If, by any means, it is possible; yes."

"It is possible, of course, if you choose to pay the forfeit," said Heywood, who had now come to the conclusion that she must be going to join Mannering abroad. "It will be a heavy one; for my losses will have to be covered. I shall ask five thousand pounds; I am sure to get three."

"Then you will go to law?" exclaimed Juliet, changing colour.

"Certainly," said Heywood composedly,

“unless you like to pay the forfeit privately.”

“Such a sum is utterly out of the question; you must know that,” said Juliet, whose heart was sinking.

“I cannot know it,” answered Heywood. “I am quite in ignorance of your position. You must have some powerful reason to make you act in such a way, and there might be circumstances which would help you out of the difficulty you are yourself raising.”

“No, it is utterly impossible for me to pay the forfeit, if you intend to fix it so high,” said Juliet.

“That I certainly shall,” answered Heywood.

Juliet's colour went and came, her self-possession began to fail her.

“Is there no other way?” she asked piteously. “I had some hopes,” she went

on hesitatingly, "that you might be able to arrange some exchange for me. I don't want to break my contract with you—I only want to avoid going on this tour."

"Which tour alone represents about a thousand pounds to me! No, my dear, I'm afraid I can't oblige you."

Juliet shrank back. She had not heard that familiar address since the dreadful evening at Portsmouth.

Mrs Elwood looked up quickly from the book she was pretending to read.

With his sweetest smile Heywood now turned to her.

"I shall be very sorry to lose your society, Mrs Elwood," he said; "but I should like to speak to Miss Vane for a few minutes alone."

Juliet was her haughtiest self instantly.

"Excuse me, Mr Heywood," she said quickly, "Mrs Elwood stays in the room at my request. I wonder you can suggest anything else after your treatment of me at Portsmouth!"

"I thought that was never to be referred to by any living being," flashed Heywood.

"Better not," said Juliet scornfully, "for your own sake. Now, whatever you have to say you can say before Mrs Elwood."

Heywood laughed a little uneasily.

"Well, if you wish it. Stage life ought to make it easy to talk about one's private affairs in public. What I have to say is, after all, brief enough. There is one other way out of this dilemma, if you choose to take it."

"Oh, tell me what it is!" exclaimed Juliet eagerly. "If you could guess how

anxious I am. I will do anything that is in my power."

"Well, this is certainly in your power. I need not go over all I said at Portsmouth. I will put the matter in a nutshell. If you like to become my wife I shall so arrange that you shall not go on this tour."

"Your wife!" repeated Juliet, in a low tone of amazement.

She was so lost in thoughts of the man whose wife she was, that this proposal simply struck her with complete surprise at first. She recovered herself, however, after a moment.

"That is quite impossible," she said, quietly and coldly. Then she rose from her chair with a stateliness that came naturally to her at critical moments. "We may consider this interview at an end, I think, Mr Heywood."

"Certainly," he said; "but kindly inform me what you are going to do."

"I will go on tour," she answered.

"Then I will say good-night," he said; and bowing slightly to Juliet, and more cordially to Mrs Elwood, he went away immediately.

"You have a mortal enemy in that man now," observed Mrs Elwood, as soon as he was gone.

"That is no new thing," answered Juliet. "Being so, why in the world should he want to marry me?"

"You must know as well as I do," said Victoria. "Because you are a money-making machine. He would have made a splendid bargain, if you had cared enough about getting out of the tour to marry him, and be his slave for life."

She cared enough to do anything *but* that. She had felt utterly desperate when

she was driven to say she would go on tour. She saw there was no choice.

And now she soon forgot Heywood and everything else in the awful thought, of how she was to face the ordeal of playing "Evangeline" again, every night, with Maurice Denvil!

"Now, I suppose," said Mrs Elwood, "I am to go on with my shop in London. We must make the arrangements quickly, if you go on Saturday."

"I suppose we travel on Sunday," said Juliet, absently.

"Then will you come into town with me to-morrow and see the landlord?" persisted Victoria.

"Certainly," said Juliet.

So it was all settled; and so Juliet's fate was taken out of her hands—as indeed it is with most of us, could we but see it.

CHAPTER XIII.

WAS IT POSSIBLE ?

JULIET willingly gave up the most part of the next day to Mrs Elwood's scheme. She was glad to get out of the house ; glad to be busied with something other than her own thoughts. She went into town with Victoria, saw the shop in Bond Street, saw the landlord, and at Mrs Elwood's request, signed the lease.

“He won't let it to me without a security,” she explained ; “but he will to you. And, of course, you will never be called upon to pay the rent after this first quarter—you won't mind that, will you ?”

Juliet did not mind at all. She made a great deal more money than she could spend; and, at the present moment, to retain Mrs Elwood's allegiance was more important than anything else. Therefore she acceded quietly enough to do what was asked of her. Driving home, Mrs Elwood further explained that she would want a little capital in the bank to begin with—three or four hundred would do—but that she must have. She knew Juliet's position well enough to know it was useless to ask for more; she relied on being able to apply to this "money-making machine" from time to time. Juliet had not dreamed of having to do so much as this, Mrs Elwood having carefully developed her scheme by degrees.

"I can't do that," said Juliet, "without selling my jewels; and I must wear them in 'Evangeline.' I can give you fifty

pounds; but that is all for the present."

"Then I shall have to begin by running into debt, I suppose," said Mrs Elwood. "A bad way of beginning; but if there's no help for it, what can I do?"

She was reflecting that Juliet Vane had good credit, and thought to herself that she had been fortunate in having executed commissions for her at certain shops which would well serve her purpose. It was beginning under difficulties, certainly; but now that she had got so far she did not intend to be discouraged in her scheme; and she meant to be perfectly unscrupulous in the means she used to carry it out. Man and nature had ill-used her, and it lay with herself to right the wrong; so she argued. And to no one did she owe a heavier grudge than to her sister, her father's legitimate child, cared for and

spoiled, gifted with beauty and genius, and with all the men at her feet. So she sat quietly by Juliet in the carriage, talking a little, but her brain working busily over her plans.

And Juliet was deeply absorbed in thinking over her own. She had to nerve herself to face the ordeal of playing with Denvil every night, of travelling with him, of seeing him constantly. Was it possible? she asked herself. She was glad she had arranged to live, while on tour, with another actress; she knew her father would not have allowed her to go without Mrs Elwood; but the plan of leaving her behind, which had been first suggested because of her marriage, she felt now would be a relief. It would have been terrible to have had anyone with her who knew as much of her secret as Victoria did,—constantly with her, and

witnessing every meeting with Denvil ! It would be easier, she felt—one degree more bearable—as it was now arranged. When she suffered, no one but Denvil himself would know why she suffered. With Victoria there she would never have felt safe, fearing some comment of hers should inadvertently reveal all. And she cared but little now for what Lord Francis might say on his return. She had been compelled to decide for herself in such terrible emergencies that she no longer leaned on anyone.

During the few days before the tour commenced Juliet saw no more of Linda, who was indeed very much occupied with her preparations, and with setting her house in order for so long an absence. Once Denvil came to Putney, but Juliet was out, and he did not dare incur her displeasure by waiting for her. He wrote

to her—such letters! She carried them in her dress, and they seemed to burn her as they lay there; for she could not forget their burning words. She carried them about with her, but she did not answer them; she could not trust herself to. She had nothing to say that she would permit herself to say! So all those days Denvil wandered about town, utterly dejected, and wondering whether in the history of the race any other man had ever been so hardly used by fate.

Juliet was busy and had little time for thought. She found that Miss Luton, the actress she had wished to live with on tour, was taking her mother; and they did not seem to care for Juliet's proposal. She went to see them, and guessed at once that this was because they could not afford to live in the same style that she did. They belonged to the struggling, hard

working, poorly-paid part of the profession, which, alas, is so much the largest part. They lived in a little house in Islington, and when Juliet drove up in her carriage there was a flutter of alarm in the small establishment. Mrs Luton had given up an engagement of her own in order to travel with her daughter, and they somewhat hesitatingly explained they would have to be very economical, and live in small lodgings; they would take no maid, the mother acting as theatrical dresser; and they evidently felt that it would be better to keep to themselves. The pinch of poverty and its many makeshifts are more easily borne alone.

So Juliet, who was quick to take a hint, withdrew her suggestion, and resolved to make it easy for these two whenever it lay in her power to do them a little kindness. This visit gave her her first insight into

the narrow life of drudgery which "being on the stage" means to so many people. Her experiences had been all of a different order, and were fated to be so to the end. She was doomed, as are all of rare beauty and talent, to live, to suffer, and to enjoy in extremes; never to work on wearily in a narrow groove.

She drove down to the theatre and obtained the address of the only other actress in the piece, Miss Tyrell, an old lady who played a small part very cleverly. She had been a very good, though never a great, actress in her time, but was now so old she could only take certain *rôles*. She played Juliet's nurse whenever Romeo and Juliet was played, and occasionally took a small character part such as she was now playing for Heywood. She was well off, having been a wise and worldly woman, and saved money for her old age.

Juliet found her living in an old house in Gower Street, where she had lived for the whole of her theatrical life—a very long one.

Miss Rosa Tyrell was delighted to receive Juliet, who was immediately ushered into the old lady's special sanctum—a room lined with portraits and theatrical photographs, the windows filled with flowers and bird-cages. Miss Tyrell, small, quaint, bright, with keen eyes and snowy-white curls, sat in a big armchair surrounded by her family of dogs and cats—two lovely white Persian cats, a big black poodle, and two tiny dogs.

“They are all the ties I have in the world, my dear,” she said, apologetically, to Juliet, as the company proceeded to make acquaintance with the new-comer. “I daresay it's very ridiculous for an old woman to be fond of dogs and cats, but

I should be very dull without my dumb friends, for all my own belongings have left the world before me, and I'm too old to find new ones."

Juliet was duly civil to the family, which was a very well-conducted one, and then proceeded to explain the object of her visit.

"Not going to take Mrs Elwood?" said the old lady. "Well, it will save your money, and that's always a good plan. Don't be extravagant while you are young, my dear, and then you can afford some comforts in your old age when you need them. Everything fails you at the end but money—love, friendship, all! Well, I shall be delighted to live with you, if you don't mind Roscoe coming in to dinner," indicating the poodle. "I always take him with me, and I think the poor dear would break his heart if he didn't dine

with me. But he is a perfect gentleman, and quite used to travelling and hotel life. You will stay at hotels, of course ; so shall I. I didn't when I was young, but now, when I'm at work, I must take life easily. You're at the top of the tree so young, my dear, you'll never have to learn anything about economy. But don't be wasteful—old age comes to us all, the prettiest and cleverest. Heywood will tell the advance-agent to engage your rooms at every town, and I'll tell him to engage mine next yours. One nice sitting-room will do for us both, won't it, my dear, if you really don't mind Roscoe. Jenny, my pet parrot, goes with me, too, and she's a dreadful chatterbox ; but she stays in my bedroom."

The bright old lady pleased and cheered Juliet, who felt she would be far happier with her than she would have been with

Mrs Elwood. Miss Tyrell was quite as cynical, but her cynicism was cheerful; and this characteristic is not so painful to witness in age as it is in youth.

Juliet having protested that she would be rather honoured by the society of Roscoe—who was indeed, as his mistress said, a most gentlemanly dog—than otherwise, all was satisfactorily settled, to her great relief.

Mrs Elwood was to live at Putney, and look after the house, driving in every day to attend to her business. Juliet had signed the lease of the shop, paid the first quarter's rent, and given Mrs Elwood such money as she could spare to make her beginning with.

And so the last day came, and all was ready for the departure. It was well that Juliet had so certain and sure a lieutenant as Graham, for she herself could think of no-

thing but that she would have to meet Denvil at all sorts of odd moments; that the very next evening she would have to play "Evangeline" with him, and go through the ordeal of the the love-scene. Was it possible? That was what she kept asking herself — was it possible? She shrank back into her corner of the carriage when they drove into the station, dreading each moment to see his figure. But no—and when she reached the train she was relieved to overhear someone say that Denvil was coming down by a later one.

The truth was, Denvil had himself so shrank from meeting her casually among others, and with Linda at his side, that he had for that reason delayed their departure.

He knew, of course, that he could not go on like this—that they *must* meet—but he had a kind of desperate feeling,

almost a conviction, that something must happen very soon to put an end to this impossible state of things.

That was what he called it; while Juliet kept asking herself. Was it possible? Was it possible?

CHAPTER XIV.

“I am paler than grass, and seem in my madness
little better than one dead.”

THAT tritest of saying, that we never know what we can do till we try, is also one of the truest. All through the journey, all through the next day, Juliet, while chatting with Miss Tyrell, and trying to be as pleasant a companion to the old lady as she wished to be, ceaselessly asked herself that question. Was it possible? Would not time itself stand still and save her? No, she saw the hours passing resolutely by, bringing nearer and nearer the fatal one when Denvil would again hold her in his arms, when every nerve of endurance would have to be strained to the uttermost

if the ordeal was to be passed safely. She would not go out all day; she dreaded meeting him. She preferred to sit by Miss Tyrell's armchair and listen to her bright, cynical talk, which distracted her mind a little from its ceaseless pain. Graham tried to tempt her out, for she knew how Juliet loved walking, and they were at a most beautiful seaside place. But Juliet, though she longed for the air, was resolute. She said she was too tired, and having so lately been ill, no one could say it might not be so; though Graham secretly wondered whether, indeed, she meant to shut herself in the house throughout the whole tour in order to avoid Denvil? For the old servant, though she had been told nothing, understood a great deal.

From the window of their hotel sitting-room she could watch the sea; its ceaseless movement brought her that strange sense

of sympathy which it gives to all perturbed spirits. All day long she sat and watched it; Roscoe, the gentlemanly poodle, having gravely accepted her as a new friend, seemed to guess that her body was so still because her mind was tormented; in the afternoon, when he came back from his walk with Miss Tyrell's maid he came and put his curly head on Juliet's lap, and gazed sadly up at her. It was a dim comfort to her to lay her hand on his gentle head; she liked to hear the chatter of the gay parroquet too, which she had persuaded Miss Tyrell to bring in from her bedroom. The old lady was immensely flattered at her favourites being so well received. She had outlived all other loves, and really cared for nothing but her pets. Juliet looked at her in dread and wonder. Was it possible for the heart to die like this? That beating, tumultuous heart,

which made her shiver with its feverish passion? Was it possible that with youth this fever died out of itself? Lord Francis was fond of quoting the words, "There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth." Was this, could this be true? Would not this passion burn within her all her life? Would not the aching in her ungratified heart always be there? Yes; she knew it would. For Juliet, though keenly sensuous, was not a sensualist. And it is only the pure sensualist who loves with the senses only, knowing nothing of the passion of the heart; for whom youth and love are synonymous terms; for him, indeed, with the first glory of the physical frame, passes the supreme pleasure of love. But with those whose love is of the heart also, its power deepens with maturity.

Juliet knew well that she was not so moulded as to be able to forget, or to

change. The martyrdom she had elected to suffer was the more profound because she was single-hearted.

And the martyrdom was at hand; it was about to begin. She watched the clock feverishly. Why did the minutes pass so quickly?

At last the fatal moment came. She had to rise, as if willingly, from her chair, to walk down to the theatre. Was there no way of escape? No; none. She silently put on her wraps and walked by Miss Tyrell's side; the maids having gone a little earlier.

The advance-agent, having been told that Miss Tyrell and Miss Vane would live together on tour, as a matter of course gave them adjoining dressing-rooms at the theatre. Juliet, being a star, had a room to herself, and the one nearest the stage. A small one opening out of this was given

to Miss Tyrell. All the other dressing-rooms were up another flight of stairs, down which continually came flying feet, hurrying to arrive in time. It is wonderful how much of a theatrical life is passed in hurrying and making haste, except by the happy "star," for whom everyone waits, even the "curtain," and who can afford to pass through life serenely for this reason. Juliet, to-night, longed, as soon as she neared the theatre, to hurry and quickly hide herself in her own room; but she would not. With heart beating furiously she followed quietly behind Miss Tyrell, letting the old lady pass before her.

Graham had all ready. Her practised hand had given the dingy room a certain likeness to Juliet's dressing-room at the London theatre. A lace-edged cloth covered the deal dressing-table, and on it were arranged all Juliet's dainty trifles that she

used in dressing and "making up." The high-placed, flaring gas was supplemented by two tall candles in silver candlesticks. Juliet sank into the chair placed in front of this altar of the toilette, and made an attempt to commence the usual routine of her task. But Graham, who was busy shaking out her dresses and hanging them up, turned round presently to see that she was sitting perfectly still, apparently in profound thought.

Graham approached her.

"I'm afraid, Miss, you'll be late."

Mechanically Juliet started at these warning words and made another attempt; but suddenly her head dropped on the dressing-table and she burst into a tempest of tears.

Graham was struck with consternation.

"Oh! Miss Juliet! Miss Juliet!" she cried.

"Do try and stop! You'll never be able to

make your face up if you cry now! Oh, Miss, let me bathe it directly—and drink this wine, it will stop you.”

The poor woman's professional distress did more than any sympathy could have done to calm Juliet. She realised the necessity of recovering herself; and after a few moments looked up with a faint smile.

“I am better now, Graham,” she said, “give me the wine. Don't be afraid; I shall be ready.”

And so she was. When the call-boy came to her door she was standing before her mirror, wondering a little at her own work, and at her own self-control. All traces of the storm had vanished. She was triumphantly beautiful. She went composedly on to the stage, where her entrance was the signal for a wildly enthusiastic ovation, which thrilled her and brought back all her courage. Full of fire and

resolution she entered on her task, the difficulty of which was unknown, undreamed of, save by Denvil, who himself, long before his entrance, stood at the wings watching her. He marvelled at her self-possession ; his own agitation was intense. He fancied he had never realised till this moment how much he loved her. He did not ask, " Was it possible,"—he simply said, " It is impossible ? " When his cue came to go on there was a moment's pause. Heywood, who had seen him standing at the wings and knew he was ready, was utterly puzzled. Juliet, standing down by the footlights, endured a long moment of agony, waiting for his voice. Denvil stood like one in a dream, his eyes on her ; and perhaps he might never have moved if the prompter had not rushed to him and cried out,—

" Go on, Mr Denvil, go on ! "

And then the complex machinery he had

forgotten to set in motion began to act of itself, as it seemed, so unconscious was he of what he was doing. He went on—spoke his words correctly—went down the stage and approached her, all like a man in a dream. But when he came to the actual business of the love-scene he suddenly awoke—he was on fire. Juliet, meeting his glance, trembled in apprehension of what might happen. He seemed no longer master of himself—the words came out with the passionate flow of spontaneity.

“I cannot, I cannot live without you!” was one of his lines, a very natural one in a love scene. “I am resolved,”—he added to it, and Juliet started at his words, they were so emphatic as to be violent,—“I will not try, I swear I will not!” At the same moment that the unaccustomed “gag” fell on her ears she caught Linda’s glance in the audience,

and saw it suddenly grow fiery. She knew Linda had noticed the addition also. After this she was so apprehensive that it made her own acting almost too nervous to be as effective as usual. Trembling, she looked often at Linda; at Denvil she dare not look at all. Linda sat at one side, where, as it happened, she could see Denvil's entrance. She had watched him stand there, his eyes fixed upon Juliet, lost in such profound thought that he never heard his cue. She was startled by this; it was so unlike him. What could be the matter—could he be ill—was he forgetting his words, as actors do if overtaxed? Was there anything wrong with him, or was it—was it— The old wild fear and mad rage of jealousy began to tear her heart again. She watched the two on the stage with the same terrible look that had been in her eyes when she watched them in

London, before she had ever spoken to Juliet. It was even wilder now, for she kept on saying to herself, "If I have been deceived—deceived—if she is a devil, instead of the angel she seems!"

Juliet, looking at her from time to time with quivering glance, knew what it must all seem like to her so well—that she read her thoughts;—this was what she dreaded most of all, that Linda should think her a devil of wickedness and deceit. She felt as if the moment Linda realised the truth and turned upon her in her rage she would herself lose all her self-respect. Even now she could not resist a guilty feeling, as if she had intentionally injured Linda or deprived her of her love. Denvil grew more inaccurate, more reckless in his speeches. Several times he added words of his own, which went straight to her heart—the audience would not detect these, but

she—and Linda, who had seen the play so often!—only two plainly recognised every hurried, passionate word that was his own. Juliet panted with terror as to what he would say next, as to what might happen. When at last the dreaded moment came, and he seized her in his arms, it was with a gesture so fiercely passionate, so little controlled, that Juliet uttered a faint cry of alarm. It seemed to her that the theatre was suddenly obscured by a great grey mist, and that Denvil was carrying her away through this mist, as an eagle carries its prey. She had fainted.

Denvil's horror, when he discovered this, sobered him, for indeed he was drunk—though not with wine. His natural instinct was to carry her instantly to her dressing-room, and attend to her, but professional habit made him go on with the scene and hide what had happened from

the audience. It was just possible, for at this instant Heywood's entrance was made. The absence of Juliet's few remaining lines could be glossed over, if she could be placed on a couch which stood on the stage. He turned to Heywood who was speaking, and under cover of his speech whispered,—

“She's fainted; I will lift her to the sofa, and go on.”

He did so, lifting her in his arms like a child. To the audience this seemed but part of the scene—to Linda, who well knew that at this part of it Juliet always stood down by the footlights, it was inexplicable. But when Denvil turned to face Heywood, and they commenced their sensational piece of acting, and Juliet's head still lay motionless where Denvil had placed it, then Linda knew this swoon was real. She rose, crept out of the theatre, and ran

quickly round to the stage door. She had been in during the day and knew how to find her way to the stage. She hurried on, and at the wings found Graham standing, the picture of consternation.

“What has happened?” demanded Linda.

“Oh, I don’t know, I don’t know!” answered Mrs Graham, quite shaken out of her usual quiet manner, “but I do know my dear Miss Juliet is ill. I must get her home; she can’t act any more to-night.”

The curtain went down amid the usual thunders of applause; this was always a very successful scene, and was none the worse to-night for being taken quickly and nervously. The audience had been excited right through the act by the feeling as of something electric, something quite unusual, on the stage. Could they have seen it, as the curtain fell and hid it from their view! Juliet was instantly surrounded. Linda, Graham, Denvil,

Heywood, were all round her at once, and others began to hurry on to the stage to see what had happened. Some ran for water, some for wine. Meantime the thunder in front of the house went on furiously.

“Come,” cried Heywood to Denvil, “we’ll pass in front of the curtain.” They did and received a full ovation; but the instant they had passed the cry for “Vane—Vane—Juliet Vane” began. Juliet opened her eyes—it was as if the sound of her own name had roused her. There was no time for words—Heywood moved the sofa round a little so that Juliet faced the house, cried out,—“Off the stage, everybody but Denvil—ring up the curtain,” and in a moment he and Denvil placed themselves ready.

The curtain was only up a moment; Juliet, roused by the light and the noise, succeeded in lifting herself and bowing to the house. As she did so she tottered and fell for-

ward; but the curtain was down, and Denvil caught her in his arms. Without a word to anyone he lifted her as he had lifted her before, and carried her straight away to her dressing-room. He heard confused words as he passed—Graham's voice saying, — "She can't go on," Heywood's asserting very positively, "She must and shall," and Linda's too; she only said, "How white she is." But Linda was before him in Juliet's dressing-room ready to receive her, with all sorts of improvised remedies; for Linda was as passionately eager in her pity and sympathy as in everything else. She could not bear the sight of suffering; it was her instinct to fly to its relief. Denvil placed Juliet in her chair, and gave Linda a look which would have killed the pity and sympathy in her breast could she have seen it. For that look said plainly,—“Wretch, this is

your work!" But Linda was bending over Juliet. A moment later and she looked up and met Denvil's eyes. The first bitter look had left them, but still there was something in his glance which startled her inexpressibly. She drew herself up, and looked at him steadily across Juliet. At once he read her meaning without need of words. Why was he here? This was no place for him. For a brief, brief pause he wavered — hesitated — half determined to claim Juliet as his own then and there, and assert his right to stay; but his better self conquered. He turned and went out of the room.

In the passage was a group of excited men, Heywood among them and the most excited of all,—“Would she be able to go on with the play? What was to be done if she couldn't? Would the house stand Miss Luton's going on to finish?” For

Miss Luton was Juliet's under-study. An actress who played in the farce which was given before "Evangeline" could take Miss Luton's part. Half-a-dozen offered to go and see if she had gone home, or was in front, or to go to Miss Luton. "The house will never stand it," said Heywood, dolefully.

Presently Miss Luton herself appeared, pale with excitement, and went straight into Juliet's dressing-room. She was terrified at the thought of playing the part, which was too heavy for her, and yet, to her it meant a great chance. She might get through it decently from sheer nervousness, and then perhaps Heywood might put her on to play it in a second tour. Such were the chances the poor girl had to count eagerly on, whether her strength or her talent were equal to them or not. So it is no wonder she was excited as she pushed

her way to the door of Juliet's room. But in a few moments she came out again, looking quiet and relieved.

“Miss Vane is better,” she said to Heywood as she passed. “She is going on.”

CHAPTER XV.

“IT IS IMPOSSIBLE!”

YES, the indomitable pride of the artist sustained her. She was ready to go on. But what it cost her no one knew but herself. She could not have done it but for Linda. Linda it was who comforted, helped, encouraged her. It was Linda's tender, caressing touch, and soft, warm kisses that seemed to bring the life back to her cold face more than anything else. And above all it was Linda who by her mere presence roused and stung Juliet with the miserable recollection of what had brought this weakness upon her. She used all her strong will to conquer it and go on with her work. She suc-

ceeded, and played better than in the early part of the evening, for the ordeal was over till to-morrow night. But she was frightfully nervous and excited. She scarcely dared lift her eyes lest she should meet Denvil's, for she felt, she knew, without seeing, that he was watching her from the wings, that he watched her all the time, and now she began to speak to herself as he did, and say in her heart "*It is impossible!*"

She began to see that this ordeal she had so keenly dreaded was literally too heavy for her strength. As all enthusiastic quixotic persons do, she had over-rated her own powers of endurance and effort.

When the play was over she walked unaided, indeed, into her dressing-room, but she walked like one who is mad with pain. Her eyes looked wildly from side to side, and Graham, who had waited at the

wings for her, shrank back from their unrecognising stare. Linda was in her dressing-room, waiting for her; and she too recoiled before those distracted - looking eyes. Juliet threw herself into a chair and sat there looking about her, but evidently seeing nothing, and sighing heavily. She did not attempt to begin undressing. Graham attempted to unfasten her dress, but Juliet bade her not, without speaking, but with a gesture so resolute there was no gainsaying it. Miss Tyrell, who was ready to go home, her part being over before Juliet's, came in from her dressing-room.

“Come, dear child,” said the old lady; “get undressed and come home to bed.”

Juliet looked at her, but took no notice of what she said; and Miss Tyrell was startled, as the others had been, by her wild look.

“She is over-excited,” she said to Linda.

"She is very young for such a heavy part, but still, I never thought before that she was so nervous as this; there is something strange about it. Juliet, dear, listen to me!—you must come home, and get to bed and rest. Let Graham change your dress for you—do be reasonable."

But no words had any effect on Juliet; indeed, she did not seem to hear them. She was thinking as she had never thought in her life before—how to escape from this dreadful position? Could she bear the pain and shame before Linda, of owning her marriage—would that be easier than this torment? No, a thousand times, no! Then what was to be done? For this was impossible!

"I'll try and coax her," said Linda, in a whisper to Miss Tyrell.

The old lady nodded and went back to her dressing-room.

Graham left the room also, for her keen observation had shown her that Linda had some curious power with Juliet. Linda gently closed the door, and then went softly up to Juliet, put her arms round her neck and laid her face against hers.

"My darling," she said in a whisper, "you have some dreadful trouble that is torturing you, and you will tell no one—I am sure of it! Why not tell me? You know I am your friend—devoted; you know I would do anything for you. It is so hard to bear a trouble quite, quite alone, and perhaps—who knows—I might help you, or I might suggest something—"

Juliet looked up into the face bent down over hers, and at the unconscious irony of the words her heart filled to overflowing. She burst out suddenly into wild weeping; the tears streamed down her face for the second time that evening. Linda drew

her head on to her bosom, and nursed her as if she were a child. After a few moments the passion of tears was exhausted, and Juliet was quiet and calm. Linda then began to undo her dress, and finding she permitted her, completed the task. Graham came back, and quickly put away the stage-dress Juliet had been wearing, and soon they were all ready to go home. Juliet leaned on Linda's arm as they left the theatre; it was Linda who helped her to her room, who persuaded her to undress and lie in her bed, who induced her to drink some wine. It seemed as if Linda could do anything with her. Juliet was as wax in her hands; she did all she wished, but one thing.

“Speak, dear,” Linda said, more than once, “tell your trouble, or your heart will break!”

To that Juliet made no answer, but only

fixed her eyes on Linda with a strange look in them. Once or twice, in her desperation, she actually speculated on what it would be like to tell her!—to tell her all!

All that night Linda stayed with her, soothing her and quieting her. Juliet could not ask her what Maurice would feel or think, though she longed to know. But quite late Linda herself volunteered the information.

“Maurice knew I came home with you,” she said, “he will not be sorry that I don’t return; for oh, Juliet, we were so wretched all yesterday!—so wretched, I cannot tell you. He is tired of me, I know; and now I feel life is a hell upon earth. Often I wish, I wish I did not love him so! I think it is wicked to love so madly, and I am being punished!”

“And I, too!” said Juliet, in her heart.

She slept not at all that night, but lay like one stupefied. Soon after the dawn Linda fell fast asleep, her head on Juliet's pillow; Juliet watched the face, so quiet in its sleep, and wondered whether it would ever be turned on her with rage and horror. And again, she vowed in her heart to keep this friendship and trust if it were possible. Ah, that "if"! She knew her strength better now; she had begun to measure it; and she dare not be so confident in her words, even to herself, now that she had begun to say so wearily, "It is impossible!"

In the morning Linda went away to the house where she and Denvil lodged; it was only in the next street. She had scarcely gone when a note was brought to Juliet. It was from Denvil. Evidently he had been watching for Linda to leave her.

"JULIET,—This cannot go on any longer!

I will not endure it, and it will kill you. I give you to-day to decide whether you will be reasonable and consult with me what to do, and act with me. If you will not, to-morrow I intend to tell Linda all myself. My endurance is at an end.

“MAURICE.”

This was the letter.

“Oh, Linda! My poor Linda! You that have held me in your tender arms all night! Am I powerless to save you?”

That was her thought, as she read it. For she knew the end was at hand. The punishment must fall on Linda for her sin and her folly in having idolised a man who cared but little for her; in having sacrificed all ties and all duties for this mad passion. Juliet tried to see that it was just, and could not. She had grown fond of Linda; she was grateful to her for

her tenderness and pity. She shrank at the thought of the blow that would fall, as one shrinks from seeing the stroke of the executioner's knife. And here shut up with them, as it were, compelled to meet—oh, no, that was also impossible. It could not be. Juliet began to ponder whether it would be possible for her to escape—once having thought of it, that seemed the only plan. Heywood would not release her, but she could release herself by simply going away. She felt but slight pricks of conscience about doing so, when she considered what Heywood's conduct had been to her. Yes, that was the best. The thought brought her some relief. All the joy, and pain, and torment would cease then at once, except in memory. It would be best for all. Yes, she would go. Calmed a little by this desperate resolve, she put the letter within her dress for safety. The envelope

had fluttered to the ground, and she was too weary to pick it up; she let it lie there, and shutting her eyes tried to form some definite plan. Should she go to Lord Francis in Russia? or should she go to America and try her luck there, taking Mrs Elwood to travel with her?

While she was turning these schemes over in her mind, Graham came into the room with a very anxious face.

“Mr Denvil is in the sitting-room, Miss Juliet,” she said, in a tone that roused Juliet instantly. “He seems so determined; I was obliged to say I would ask you to see him. I met him on the stairs; he had found out that Miss Tyrell is not down yet, and a servant was bringing him to the sitting-room, for he wants to see you alone. Will you put on your black dress, Miss?”

There was something in the old servant's

manner, and in her face, that showed Juliet she must go down to him. What had he said to Graham? Had he told her any of the truth? Was he mad to-day? What would happen next? Full of doubt and trepidation she rose, without a word, and let Graham put on her black dress, glancing at her from time to time in the hope of detecting what she knew. But Graham made no further sign. Juliet dressed quickly and went downstairs in a few moments.

Denvil was walking restlessly up and down the room, glancing eagerly at the door. The moment she entered, he sprang to her and caught her hands. Never had she seen him look so resolute, so fierce in his love. She faltered before him, not knowing how to meet this mood. He was no suppliant to-day, but was resolved to master her will. She read that in the

glitter of his eyes. Their tender softness, which had won her heart, was gone.

He drew away from the door and began to talk quickly—eagerly, but in a low voice. She hardly heeded what he said—she only understood that he gave her till to-morrow — and to-morrow he meant to take the law into his own hands. Then she must escape before he could tell Linda. Should she go to-night before the play, or in the early morning? The morning would be better; it would give her more time to get away before anyone suspected her flight. Those were her thoughts, as she stood there under the torrent of words he poured on her. For they stood, in the centre of the room, regarding each other. At last he paused for her to speak. When she became aware of this, she roused herself.

“I will have no hand in it. Linda has been

kind to me—she has been like a sister to me. I will not help to break her heart.”

She turned as she spoke, and went a little away from him. At that moment the door was opened quietly. Both looked round to see who was entering. It was Linda; pale as death, her great dark eyes flaming in her pale face. She looked from one to the other. In her hand was an envelope. Juliet saw it was the envelope of Denvil's note to her, and instantly guessed what had happened. Finding Denvil was out, Linda had returned to the hotel, and gone straight to Juliet's own room. There she had found this envelope, lying on the floor where it had fallen. What would happen now? Juliet could not guess; she realised fully in the moment's pause what it must be like to stand on a volcano. But the pause was very slight. The three stood still

regarding each other; then Linda closed the door behind her, and walked up to Denvil. She showed him the envelope she still held, and then addressed him in a very low voice.

"I know all," she said. "You were waiting in the street to watch me out of the hotel before you sent up this note. I quite understand. Oh, I have seen it a long time. I know you are tired of me. I know you are in love with Juliet Vane. You need not try to hide it. I am not blind; but don't think Juliet Vane will have you. She despises you. Any woman must despise a man who deceives his wife in the pitiful way you do me. And Juliet Vane is too good for you; she has promised me she will have nothing to say to you. I believe her. A woman's word is to be trusted—a man's never, never! I trust her, but I not only despise, I hate you. Never fear, you shall suffer. I have loved you with

all my strength, and now I will hate you with all my strength. I will make you miserable all your life, so that you shall wish you had never been born. Trust me for that. Don't think to escape me or shake me off. I will follow you all over the world ; you will never be safe from me. Wretched deceiver ! to come watching about the house till I should leave it. Ah, how paltry men are. When women sin and lie to hide their fault, they can do it grandly by the side of such poor deceivers as you. You may throw off the mask, Maurice Denvil, you can't deceive me any longer. Now, I know you are false to me—to me that have given my whole heart, my whole life, my all to you. I will not be thrown aside like a broken toy just because another woman has a fair skin and bright hair. It shall not be. You do not know me yet—”

Suddenly her voice, which had so far been

low, though she had spoken very quickly, rose into a scream. Passion, rage, pure unadulterated rage, took possession of her and shook her like a storm. A wild chaos of terrible words came from her lips — accusations of every sort, fierce promises of revenge, and some language such as Juliet never could have imagined falling from Linda's lips had she not actually heard it. She was transformed by rage, and reached a state of frenzy when all consciousness of what was about her had left her. In this condition she would have cried out in the same terrible way in a *salon* full of people—all she knew was that Denvil stood before her. He made several efforts to stop her, but it was impossible. At last she said something, Juliet did not hear what, that suddenly extinguished his last scrap of patience. He seized her arm with a grasp of iron and hurried her to the door. In his hands this slight woman was as helpless as a child, if

he chose to put out his strength. And he did now. It was none too late. Miss Tyrell stood in the doorway of the room, surveying the scene with absolute amazement. Denvil swept Linda past her, and down the stairway of the hotel. They were gone. A sudden silence fell after the storm. Miss Tyrell advanced into the room, and sat down on the nearest chair.

“What a terrible exhibition!” she said. “What a terrible woman! I should never have thought it of her. How can any woman forget herself so? And how in the world came a popular beauty like Maurice Denvil to tie himself up with a jealous cat like that? I should run away from her. If I were a man I wouldn’t live another day with her after such a scene. Why, all the people in the hotel must have heard her. Oh, I’d cut my throat if I were young Denvil sooner than be that woman’s husband. Posi-

tively I'm quite shaken with only looking on for a minute. And you are as white as a sheet. How dreadful ! How perfectly dreadful ! ”

CHAPTER XVI.

SOLITUDE, AGONY, PASSION!

How that day passed Juliet hardly knew. She was in constant dread of some fresh occurrence ; but nothing happened. She tried to fix her mind on her own plans, and come to some definite decisions ; but it seemed a hopeless task. She could think of nothing but those two as she had last seen them—Denvil silently grasping that wild fury of a woman. How did it end ? How could it end ? It was impossible for her to conjecture. She had never witnessed such a scene in her life, and was quite unable to form any idea as to its conclusion. And that was Linda ! Linda, the tender, soft, gentle creature who had seemed all

sweetness and gentleness ! The whole affair was an unutterable surprise, a complete revelation to Juliet. She shuddered at the recollection of it, yet she could not keep her mind away from it. How horrible ! It must alienate any love, such a scene as that. Had it ever happened before ? Was that what Denvil meant when he said he had feared a scene at the church if they had a marriage of ceremony ?

Juliet sat quietly all day, thinking thus and listening a little to Miss Tyrell's chat. Every now and then the old lady reverted to the scene of the morning, which had agitated her very much.

"How I do dislike a low-bred woman !" she said ; "and it is only a low-bred woman who will make a scene like that. And how useless it is ! Once begin to scold a man, and all romance flies out of the window. But what a strange creature Linda Denvil

is—she changes completely with her moods—I should hardly have recognised her. Oh, my dear child, I hope you won't be jealous when you are married. It is a perfect martyrdom to the wife, and always makes her husband dislike and despise her. Best of all not to marry at all; but a beautiful creature like you will have to marry of course; well, then, I hope it will be a man you don't care about. That's the only kind of marriage which brings comfort. Marry a man who admires you, and who is a gentleman, and let him take care of you and make you happy. No doubt he will if you are free, both of you, from these violent emotions which tear hearts and homes to pieces. I don't believe in love as a thing to live with. It is a thing to live through and recover from, or look back upon as a misfortune successfully evaded."

Juliet — in love !—so terribly in love — and a wife—what could she say in answer to such talk ? She was still in that early state when the emotions of the heart seem to be final realities. It was impossible for her to imagine that they could be lived down, put back, forgotten, and in the end looked on as the useless lumber of life. At the time these sayings seemed to her to have as much sense as the parroquet's chatter, or a little less. But she remembered them long afterwards.

There is nothing so enervating as a ceaseless dread. Juliet lived through a dreadful day, not caring to open a book or busy herself with anything. All she could do was to sit still in her chair and watch the door continually ; she started at every sound. What she expected she did not know—except that she feared and dreaded to see Linda enter.

But she did not. Nothing happened. The evening came, and the time approached to go down to the theatre.

For the first time Juliet realised what a mechanical life an actor's is. Happen what will at home, or in your own heart, the curtain goes up at the theatre all the same, and the poor puppet must be ready to play its part as usual. But habit is second nature; and with Juliet professional habit was inherited, and almost instinctive. She felt like a sheep about to be driven to the slaughter as she watched the inexorable clock march on to the hour of the performance. But though she thought wildly of escape, she knew it was impossible to-night—she would be followed at once. She schooled herself to do what in any other position in the world would have appeared absolutely impossible. To an actress it was intolerable, but not impossible, to again go through

that love-scene, with Linda's eyes upon her! But the shrinking from the ordeal which she experienced gave her a distaste for her profession, a horror of its publicity, which she never quite overcame afterwards. It seemed to her as if she was compelled to show her very heart and soul to the people who paid their money at the door. She lost her sense of superiority to them—she felt herself to be their servant—from the moment when this happens the first keen pleasure of the histrionic life is gone.

The hour came, and Juliet rose and put on her wraps and gave her arm to Miss Tyrell and walked quietly to the theatre. She was more collected than she had been the day before; having resolved to go—to choose the sacrifice of her position and career rather than continue in this suffering, she was calmed by her resolution.

Denvil was standing at the stage door ; Miss Tyrell felt the arm quiver on which she leaned when they came within sight of him. He had the determined look on his face which Juliet now began to know. It was useless to try and pass him ; he intended to speak to her, evidently. So she let Miss Tyrell pass in first. Denvil put his hand on her arm to detain her. She turned and looked at him.

“ Now, Juliet,” he said, almost sternly, “ you see the life you condemn me to. What is the use of it ? I have also grown accustomed to scenes like that ; but I am sick of them. Why should you wish me to continue such a wretched state of existence ? ”

“ You should not make her jealous,” said Juliet in a low voice.

“ Jealous ! ” repeated Denvil. “ Supposing she were my wife and had any claim on me,

it would not justify such exhibitions ; but as it is !”

Juliet knew he was right. “Nothing is so implacable as taste,” says the author of *Mademoiselle Mari*. It is only too true. Juliet knew well that no man of taste could love Linda after having witnessed one of these outbursts. She herself experienced the disgust, the feeling of shrinking from her. Had she seen Linda like this first, instead of in her irresistible, pathetic, loving humour, she would have felt no sympathy for her, have made no sacrifice for her. But Linda had appealed to Juliet in the right way first, and nothing could make her forget that passionate cry of suffering, “Don’t take him from me ! He is all I have ! I love him so madly !”

Her mind went over all this as she stood there at the stage door. She made no immediate answer. Perhaps she might have

hardened her heart to Linda even now, were it not for the recollection of those long hours of the weary night when Linda had nursed her, had tended her like a sister, like an angel.

“She has been so good to me,” murmured Juliet. “I love her; I cannot hurt her; and she trusts me! Maurice, don’t say any more to night.”

So saying she quickly turned and left him. It was useless to talk longer; she would go to-morrow morning; she would never see him again.

That was such a simple way out of the difficulty; so simple, so easy. It was all she could do in it. If Linda lost Denvil’s love by her own acts, that was another matter. Thinking like this, and comforting herself with the idea that she was going to do the one heroic thing left for her to do, Juliet hurried to her dressing-room.

Linda was there. Everything was placed ready for Juliet's dressing, but Graham was not in the room. Linda had begged of her two or three minutes alone with Juliet. The instant Juliet came in Linda flung herself on the ground before her.

“Can you forgive me?” she begged. “I don't know what I said to-day. I was mad—mad! Oh, Juliet, forgive me! I would not offend you or lose your friendship for all the world. Juliet, say you forgive me; for I am so wretched and I have no one to speak to in all the world but you. Oh, Juliet, he is so angry with me! Never have I seen him as he was to-day—white, cold, hard. Nothing I could do or say would touch him. I used to be able to win him back to me always with my kisses and sweet words; but I have lost the power now! It is over. What shall I do, what shall I do? Juliet, is it you he loves? I know you will tell me

true ; I trust you absolutely. You will not let him love you, I know that ; you will not take him from me. I trust you ; I believe in you ; I know you will not ; but tell me, tell me, Juliet, did he come to speak to you of love to-day ? *Dare* he, with me here ? Is it possible ? Oh, no, it is impossible ! But can you wonder if I have such wild thoughts when he is so cold to me and kills my heart with a look ? Juliet, dear, beautiful Juliet, I am sure it is you ; no one could help loving you. I would rather know it, for then I shall have hope. You will not listen to him ; you will always be hard to him ; you are not like those wretched women who love to make misery with their beauty and take men away from their wives ; you will tell him to go back to the wife who worships the very ground he walks on, who has given up her life, her all for him. I know you will, Juliet Yes,

I shall have hope, if it is you ; you are sorry for me. You love me a little, don't you ? I am sure of it. Oh, how sweet it is to be loved, and how dreadful it is to feel as I do when he looks at me so coldly, so cruelly. Juliet, how is it you have bewitched him ? Ah, that is easy, it is your beauty, your golden white beauty, for I am sure you have not tried to bewitch him ; but I must try and learn from you. I can never be beautiful—I must always be dark—but, Juliet, I know there are spells stronger than beauty. I must win him back ; will you help me ? Oh, Juliet, see how humble I am now. You have forgiven me, have you not ? You will help me ? Why don't you speak ? Kiss me then if you won't speak ! *You* are not tired of my kisses—they are new to you—and oh, Juliet, I love so desperately when I love ! Is it not terrible—terrible he should weary of me ? But I

will win him back. Oh, I will win him back. With you to help me I am sure of it. Make him think you are cold and hard as ice. Why, my darling, your lips *are* like ice. Oh, you are not going to faint now! Oh, my dear, there is only just time to dress—Graham!”

Graham, who was in the passage, heard the sharp cry of alarm, and came quickly in. But Juliet was not going to faint. Relieved by Graham's presence from the strain of Linda's appeal, she drew a deep breath and roused herself. “To-morrow, early, I go!” This was the thought that strengthened her. She put out a trembling hand to Linda.

“Leave me, dear,” she said, “I must dress quickly; you may trust me.”

“I know it!” exclaimed Linda, her face looking wonderfully beautiful, with the expression on it that Juliet's words

called up. Juliet turned upon her a long, earnest gaze. Was it possible that this was the fury of the morning? How altered was the face by the difference in the emotions! It seemed scarcely credible; yet it was true. It was with a sigh of pity for Maurice that Juliet turned hastily to begin her toilette. To have loved this passionate creature, and to have had the love worn out by her tempestuous rages—it was not an enviable lot. “How much grief comes from love,” was Juliet’s thought. Her heart was very sad within her, the future was dark and hopeless; what had she to look forward to? Her heart was with Denvil for her life she well knew; and to a woman of her temperament such a marriage as hers, though she might fly from it, was final. She was Maurice Denvil’s wife, now and always, though she surrendered him to one

who seemed to her, in the sight of both God and man, to have the prior claim.

“She will never know,” thought Juliet, with another sigh, “she never can know, all my sacrifice for her ! ’

END OF VOL. II.

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